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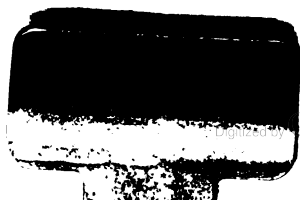
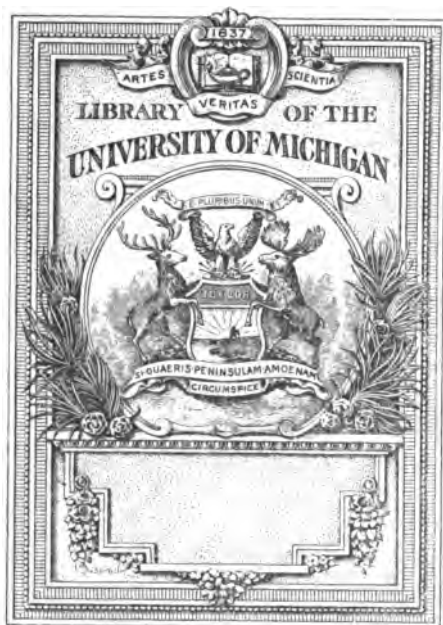
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SOLE AUTHORISED VERSION IN THE ENGLISH
LANGUAGE

TRANSLATED BY

ERNEST ALFRED VIZETELLY

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ROME

IX

THAT evening at dusk, as Benedetta had sent Pierre word that she desired to see him, he went down to her little *salon*, and there found her chatting with Celia.

"I've seen your Pierina, you know," exclaimed the latter, just as the young priest came in. "And with Dario, too. Or rather, she must have been watching for him; he found her waiting in a path on the Pincio and smiled at her. I understood at once. What a beauty she is!"

Benedetta smiled at her friend's enthusiasm; but her lips twitched somewhat painfully, for, however sensible she might be, this passion, which she realised to be so naïve and so strong, was beginning to make her suffer. She certainly made allowances for Dario, but the girl was too much in love with him, and she feared the consequences. Even in turning the conversation she allowed the secret of her heart to escape her. "Pray sit down, Monsieur l'Abbé," she said, "we are talking scandal, you see. My poor Dario is accused of making love to every pretty woman in Rome. People say that it's he who gives La Tonietta

those white roses which she has been exhibiting at the Corso every afternoon for a fortnight past.

"That's certain, my dear," retorted Celia impetuously. "At first people were in doubt, and talked of little Pontecorvo and Lieutenant Moretta. But every one now knows that La Toniotta's caprice is Dario. Besides, he joined her in her box at the Costanzi the other evening."

Pierre remembered that the young Prince had pointed out La Toniotta at the Pincio one afternoon. She was one of the few *demi-mondaines* that the higher-class society of Rome took an interest in. For a month or so the rich Englishman to whom she owed her means had been absent, travelling.

"Ah!" resumed Benedetta, whose budding jealousy was entirely confined to La Pierina, "so my poor Dario is ruining himself in white roses! Well, I shall have to twit him about it. But one or another of these beauties will end by robbing me of him if our affairs are not soon settled. Fortunately, I have had some better news. Yes, my suit is to be taken in hand again, and my aunt has gone out to-day on that very account."

Then, as Victorine came in with a lamp, and Celia rose to depart, Benedetta turned towards Pierre, who also was rising from his chair: "Please stay," said she; "I wish to speak to you."

However, Celia still lingered, interested by the mention of the divorce suit, and eager to know if the cousins would soon be able to marry. And at last throwing her arms round Benedetta, she kissed her passionately. "So you are hopeful, my dear," she

exclaimed. "You think that the Holy Father will give you back your liberty? Oh! I am so pleased; it will be so nice for you to marry Dario! And I'm well pleased on my own account, for my father and mother are beginning to yield. Only yesterday I said to them with that quiet little air of mine, 'I want Attilio, and you must give him me.' And then my father flew into a furious passion and upbraided me, and shook his fist at me, saying that if he'd made my head as hard as his own he would know how to break it. My mother was there quite silent and vexed, and all at once he turned to her and said: 'Here, give her that Attilio she wants, and then perhaps we shall have some peace!' Oh yes! I'm well pleased, very well pleased indeed!"

As she spoke her pure virginal face beamed with so much innocent, celestial joy that Pierre and Benedetta could not help laughing. And at last she went off attended by a maid who had waited for her in the first *salon*.

When they were alone Benedetta made the priest sit down again: "I have been asked to give you some important advice, my friend," she said. "It seems that the news of your presence in Rome is spreading, and that bad reports of you are circulated. Your book is said to be a fierce appeal to schism, and you are spoken of as a mere ambitious, turbulent schismatic. After publishing your book in Paris you have come to Rome, it is said, to raise a fearful scandal over it in order to make it sell. Now, if you still desire to see his Holiness, so as to plead your cause before him, you are advised to make people forget

you, to disappear altogether for a fortnight or three weeks."

Pierre was stupefied. Why, they would end by maddening him with all the obstacles they raised to exhaust his patience; they would actually implant in him an idea of schism, of an avenging, liberating scandal! He wished to protest and refuse the advice, but all at once he made a gesture of weariness. What would be the good of it, especially with that young woman, who was certainly sincere and affectionate. "Who asked you to give me this advice?" he inquired. She did not answer, but smiled, and with sudden intuition he resumed: "It was Monsignor Nani, was it not?"

Thereupon, still unwilling to give a direct reply, she began to praise the prelate. He had at last consented to guide her in her divorce affair; and Donna Serafina had gone to the Palace of the Inquisition that very afternoon in order to acquaint him with the result of certain steps she had taken. Father Lorenza, the confessor of both the Boccanera ladies, was to be present at the interview, for the idea of the divorce was in reality his own. He had urged the two women to it in his eagerness to sever the bond which the patriotic priest Pisoni had tied full of such fine illusions. Benedetta became quite animated as she explained the reasons of her hopefulness. "Monsignor Nani can do everything," she said, "and I am very happy that my affair should be in his hands. You must be reasonable also, my friend; do as you are requested. I'm sure you will some day be well pleased at having taken this advice."

Pierre had bowed his head and remained thoughtful. There was nothing unpleasant in the idea of remaining for a few more weeks in Rome, where day by day his curiosity found so much fresh food. Of course, all these delays were calculated to discourage him and bend his will. Yet what did he fear, since he was still determined to relinquish nothing of his book, and to see the Holy Father for the sole purpose of proclaiming his new faith? Once more, in silence, he took that oath, then yielded to Benedetta's entreaties. And as he apologised for being a source of embarrassment in the house she exclaimed: "No, no, I am delighted to have you here. I fancy that your presence will bring us good fortune now that luck seems to be changing in our favour."

It was then agreed that he would no longer prowl around St. Peter's and the Vatican, where his constant presence must have attracted attention. He even promised that he would virtually spend a week indoors, desirous as he was of reperusing certain books, certain pages of Rome's history. Then he went on chatting for a moment, lulled by the peacefulness which reigned around him, since the lamp had illumined the *salon* with its sleepy radiance. Six o'clock had just struck, and outside all was dark.

"Wasn't his Eminence indisposed to-day?" the young man asked.

"Yes," replied the Contessina. "But we are not anxious: it is only a little fatigue. He sent Don Vigilio to tell me that he intended to shut himself up in his room and dictate some letters. So there can be nothing much the matter, you see."

Silence fell again. For a while not a sound came from the deserted street or the old empty mansion, mute and dreamy like a tomb. But all at once the soft somnolence, instinct with all the sweetness of a dream of hope, was disturbed by a tempestuous entry, a whirl of skirts, a gasp of terror. It was Victorine, who had gone off after bringing the lamp, but now returned, scared and breathless: "Contessina! Contessina!"

Benedetta had risen, suddenly quite white and cold, as at the advent of a blast of misfortune. "What, what is it? Why do you run and tremble?" she asked.

"Dario, Monsieur Dario — down below. I went down to see if the lantern in the porch were alight, as it is so often forgotten. And in the dark, in the porch, I stumbled against Monsieur Dario. He is on the ground; he has a knife-thrust somewhere."

A cry leapt from the *amorosa's* heart: "Dead!"

"No, no, wounded."

But Benedetta did not hear; in a louder and louder voice she cried: "Dead! dead!"

"No, no, I tell you, he spoke to me. And for Heaven's sake, be quiet. He silenced me because he did not want any one to know; he told me to come and fetch you — only you. However, as Monsieur l'Abbé is here, he had better help us. We shall be none too many."

Pierre listened, also quite aghast. And when Victorine wished to take the lamp her trembling hand, with which she had no doubt felt the prostrate body, was seen to be quite bloody. The sight filled Bene-

detta with so much horror that she again began to moan wildly.

"Be quiet, be quiet!" repeated Victorine. "We ought not to make any noise in going down. I shall take the lamp, because we must at all events be able to see. Now, quick, quick!"

Across the porch, just at the entrance of the vestibule, Dario lay prone upon the slabs, as if, after being stabbed in the street, he had only had sufficient strength to take a few steps before falling. And he had just fainted, and lay there with his face very pale, his lips compressed, and his eyes closed. Benedetta, recovering the energy of her race amidst her excessive grief, no longer lamented or cried out, but gazed at him with wild, tearless, dilated eyes, as though unable to understand. The horror of it all was the suddenness and mysteriousness of the catastrophe, the why and wherefore of this murderous attempt amidst the silence of the old deserted palace, black with the shades of night. The wound had as yet bled but little, for only the Prince's clothes were stained.

"Quick, quick!" repeated Victorine in an undertone after lowering the lamp and moving it around. "The porter isn't there — he's always at the carpenter's next door — and you see that he hasn't yet lighted the lantern. Still he may come back at any moment. So the Abbé and I will carry the Prince into his room at once." She alone retained her head, like a woman of well-balanced mind and quiet activity. The two others, whose stupor continued, listened to her and obeyed her with the docility of children. "Contessina," she continued, "you must light us. Here, take the lamp and lower

it a little so that we may see the steps. You, Abbé, take the feet; I'll take hold of him under the arm-pits. And don't be alarmed, the poor dear fellow isn't heavy."

Ah! that ascent of the monumental staircase with its low steps and its landings as spacious as guard-rooms. They facilitated the cruel journey, but how lugubrious looked the little *cortège* under the flickering glimmer of the lamp which Benedetta held with arm outstretched, stiffened by determination! And still not a sound came from the old lifeless dwelling, nothing but the silent crumbling of the walls, the slow decay which was making the ceilings crack. Victorine continued to whisper words of advice whilst Pierre, afraid of slipping on the shiny slabs, put forth an excess of strength which made his breath come short. Huge, wild shadows danced over the big expanse of bare wall up to the very vaults decorated with sunken panels. So endless seemed the ascent that at last a halt became necessary; but the slow march was soon resumed. Fortunately Dario's apartments—bed-chamber, dressing-room, and sitting-room—were on the first floor adjoining those of the Cardinal in the wing facing the Tiber; so, on reaching the landing, they only had to walk softly along the corridor, and at last, to their great relief, laid the wounded man upon his bed.

Victorine vented her satisfaction in a light laugh. "That's done," said she; "put the lamp on that table, Contessina. I'm sure nobody heard us. It's lucky that Donna Serafina should have gone out, and that his Eminence should have shut himself up with Don Vigilio. I wrapped my skirt round Monsieur Dario's

shoulders, you know, so I don't think any blood fell on the stairs. By and by, too, I'll go down with a sponge and wipe the slabs in the porch—" She stopped short, looked at Dario, and then quickly added: "He's breathing—now I'll leave you both to watch over him while I go for good Doctor Gior-dano, who saw you come into the world, Contessina. He's a man to be trusted."

Alone with the unconscious sufferer in that dim chamber, which seemed to quiver with the frightful horror that filled their hearts, Benedetta and Pierre remained on either side of the bed, as yet unable to exchange a word. The young woman first opened her arms and wrung her hands whilst giving vent to a hollow moan, as if to relieve and exhale her grief; and then, leaning forward, she watched for some sign of life on that pale face whose eyes were closed. Dario was certainly breathing, but his respiration was slow and very faint, and some time went by before a touch of colour returned to his cheeks. At last, however, he opened his eyes, and then she at once took hold of his hand and pressed it, instilling into the pressure all the anguish of her heart. Great was her happiness on feeling that he feebly returned the clasp.

"Tell me," she said, "you can see me and hear me, can't you? What has happened, good God?"

He did not at first answer, being worried by the presence of Pierre. On recognising the young priest, however, he seemed content that he should be there, and then glanced apprehensively round the room to see if there were anybody else. And at last he murmured: "No one saw me, no one knows?"

"No, no; be easy. We carried you up with Victorine without meeting a soul. Aunt has just gone out, uncle is shut up in his rooms."

At this Dario seemed relieved, and he even smiled. "I don't want anybody to know, it is so stupid," he murmured.

"But in God's name what has happened?" she again asked him.

"Ah! I don't know, I don't know," was his response, as he lowered his eyelids with a weary air as if to escape the question. But he must have realised that it was best for him to confess some portion of the truth at once, for he resumed: "A man was hidden in the shadow of the porch—he must have been waiting for me. And so, when I came in, he dug his knife into my shoulder, there."

Forthwith she again leant over him, quivering, and gazing into the depths of his eyes: "But who was the man, who was he?" she asked. Then, as he, in a yet more weary way, began to stammer that he didn't know, that the man had fled into the darkness before he could recognise him, she raised a terrible cry: "It was Prada! it was Prada, confess it, I know it already!" And, quite delirious, she went on: "I tell you that I know it! Ah! I would not be his, and he is determined that we shall never belong to one another. Rather than have that he will kill you on the day when I am free to be your wife! Oh! I know him well; I shall never, never be happy. Yes, I know it well, it was Prada, Prada!"

But sudden energy upbuoyed the wounded man, and he loyally protested: "No, no, it was not Prada,

nor was it any one working for him. That I swear to you. I did not recognise the man, but it wasn't Prada — no, no!"

There was such a ring of truth in Dario's words that Benedetta must have been convinced by them. But terror once more overpowered her, for the hand she held was suddenly growing soft, moist, and powerless. Exhausted by his effort, Dario had fallen back, again fainting, his face quite white and his eyes closed. And it seemed to her that he was dying. Distracted by her anguish, she felt him with trembling, groping hands: "Look, look, Monsieur l'Abbé!" she exclaimed. "But he is dying, he is dying; he is already quite cold. Ah! God of heaven, he is dying!"

Pierre, terribly upset by her cries, sought to reassure her, saying: "He spoke too much; he has lost consciousness, as he did before. But I assure you that I can feel his heart beating. Here, put your hand here, Contessina. For mercy's sake don't distress yourself like that; the doctor will soon be here, and everything will be all right."

But she did not listen to him, and all at once he was lost in amazement, for she flung herself upon the body of the man she adored, caught it in a frantic embrace, bathed it with tears and covered it with kisses whilst stammering words of fire: "Ah! if I were to lose you, if I were to lose you! And to think that I repulsed you, that I would not accept happiness when it was yet possible! Yes, that idea of mine, that vow I made to the Madonna! Yet how could she be offended by our happiness? And then,

and then, if she has deceived me, if she takes you from me, ah! then I can have but one regret—that I did not damn myself with you—yes, yes, damnation rather than that we should never, never be each other's!"

Was this the woman who had shown herself so calm, so sensible, so patient the better to ensure her happiness? Pierre was terrified, and no longer recognised her. He had hitherto seen her so reserved, so modest, with a childish charm that seemed to come from her very nature! But under the threatening blow she feared, the terrible blood of the Boccaneras had awoke within her with a long heredity of violence, pride, frantic and exasperated longings. She wished for her share of life, her share of love! And she moaned and she clamoured, as if death, in taking her lover from her, were tearing away some of her own flesh.

"Calm yourself, I entreat you, madame," repeated the priest. "He is alive, his heart beats. You are doing yourself great harm."

But she wished to die with her lover: "O my darling! if you must go, take me, take me with you. I will lay myself on your heart, I will clasp you so tightly with my arms that they shall be joined to yours, and then we must needs be buried together. Yes, yes, we shall be dead, and we shall be wedded all the same—wedded in death! I promised that I would belong to none but you, and I will be yours in spite of everything, even in the grave. O my darling, open your eyes, open your mouth, kiss me if you don't want me to die as soon as you are dead!"

A blaze of wild passion, full of blood and fire, had passed through that mournful chamber with old, sleepy walls. But tears were now overcoming Benedetta, and big gasping sobs at last threw her, blinded and strengthless, on the edge of the bed. And fortunately an end was put to the terrible scene by the arrival of the doctor whom Victorine had fetched.

Doctor Giordano was a little old man of over sixty, with white curly hair, and fresh-looking, clean-shaven countenance. By long practice among Churchmen he had acquired the paternal appearance and manner of an amiable prelate. And he was said to be a very worthy man, tending the poor for nothing, and displaying ecclesiastical reserve and discretion in all delicate cases. For thirty years past the whole Boccanera family, children, women, and even the most eminent Cardinal himself, had in all cases of sickness been placed in the hands of this prudent practitioner. Lighted by Victorine and helped by Pierre, he undressed Dario, who was roused from his swoon by pain; and after examining the wound he declared with a smile that it was not at all dangerous. The young Prince would at the utmost have to spend three weeks in bed, and no complications were to be feared. Then, like all the doctors of Rome, enamoured of the fine thrusts and cuts which day by day they have to dress among chance patients of the lower classes, he complacently lingered over the wound, doubtless regarding it as a clever piece of work, for he ended by saying to the Prince in an undertone: "That's what we call a warning. The man didn't want to kill, the blow was dealt downwards so that the knife might

slip through the flesh without touching the bone. Ah! a man really needs to be skilful to deal such a stab; it was very neatly done."

"Yes, yes," murmured Dario, "he spared me; had he chosen he could have pierced me through."

Benedetta did not hear. Since the doctor had declared the case to be free from danger, and had explained that the fainting fits were due to nervous shock, she had fallen in a chair, quite prostrated. Gradually, however, some gentle tears coursed from her eyes, bringing relief after her frightful despair, and then, rising to her feet, she came and kissed Dario with mute and passionate delight.

"I say, my dear doctor," resumed the Prince, "it's useless for people to know of this. It's so ridiculous. Nobody has seen anything, it seems, excepting Monsieur l'Abbé, whom I ask to keep the matter secret. And in particular I don't want anybody to alarm the Cardinal or my aunt, or indeed any of our friends."

Doctor Giordano indulged in one of his placid smiles. "*Bene, bene*," said he, "that's natural; don't worry yourself. We will say that you have had a fall on the stairs and have dislocated your shoulder. And now that the wound is dressed you must try to sleep, and don't get feverish. I will come back to-morrow morning."

That evening of excitement was followed by some very tranquil days, and a new life began for Pierre, who at first remained indoors, reading and writing, with no other recreation than that of spending his afternoons in Dario's room, where he was certain to find Benedetta. After a somewhat intense fever last-

ing for eight and forty hours, cure took its usual course, and the story of the dislocated shoulder was so generally believed, that the Cardinal insisted on Donna Serafina departing from her habits of strict economy, to have a second lantern lighted on the landing in order that no such accident might occur again. And then the monotonous peacefulness was only disturbed by a final incident, a threat of trouble, as it were, with which Pierre found himself mixed up one evening when he was lingering beside the convalescent patient.

Benedetta had absented herself for a few minutes, and as Victorine, who had brought up some broth, was leaning towards the Prince to take the empty cup from him, she said in a low voice: "There's a girl, Monsieur, La Pierina, who comes here every day, crying and asking for news of you. I can't get rid of her, she's always prowling about the place, so I thought it best to tell you of it."

Unintentionally, Pierre heard her and understood everything. Dario, who was looking at him, at once guessed his thoughts, and without answering Victorine exclaimed: "Yes, Abbé, it was that brute Tito! How idiotic, eh?" At the same time, although the young man protested that he had done nothing whatever for the girl's brother to give him such a "warning," he smiled in an embarrassed way, as if vexed and even somewhat ashamed of being mixed up in an affair of the kind. And he was evidently relieved when the priest promised that he would see the girl, should she come back, and make her understand that she ought to remain at home.

"It was such a stupid affair!" the Prince repeated,

with an exaggerated show of anger. "Such things are not of our times."

But all at once he ceased speaking, for Benedetta entered the room. She sat down again beside her dear patient, and the sweet, peaceful evening then took its course in the old sleepy chamber, the old, lifeless palace, whence never a sound arose.

When Pierre began to go out again he at first merely took a brief airing in the district. The Via Giulia interested him, for he knew how splendid it had been in the time of Julius II, who had dreamt of lining it with sumptuous palaces. Horse and foot races then took place there during the carnival, the Palazzo Farnese being the starting-point, and the Piazza of St. Peter's the goal. Pierre had also lately read that a French ambassador, D'Estrée, Marquis de Couré, had resided at the Palazzo Sacchetti, and in 1638 had given some magnificent entertainments in honour of the birth of the Dauphin,¹ when on three successive days there had been racing from the Ponte Sisto to San Giovanni dei Fiorentini amidst an extraordinary display of sumptuosity: the street being strewn with flowers, and rich hangings adorning every window. On the second evening there had been fireworks on the Tiber, with a machine representing the ship *Argo* carrying Jason and his companions to the recovery of the Golden Fleece; and, on another occasion, the Farnese fountain, the *Mascherone*, had flowed with wine. Nowadays, however, all was changed. The street, bright with sunshine or steeped in shadow according to the hour, was ever silent and deserted. The

¹ Afterwards Louis XIV. — *Trans.*

heavy, ancient palatial houses, their old doors studded with plates and nails, their windows barred with huge iron gratings, always seemed to be asleep, whole storeys showing nothing but closed shutters as if to keep out the daylight for evermore. Now and again, when a door was open, you espied deep vaults, damp, cold courts, green with mildew, and encompassed by colonnades like cloisters. Then, in the outbuildings of the mansions, the low structures which had collected more particularly on the side of the Tiber, various small silent shops had installed themselves. There was a baker's, a tailor's, and a bookbinder's, some fruiterers' shops with a few tomatoes and salad plants set out on boards, and some wine-shops which claimed to sell the vintages of Frascati and Genzano, but whose customers seemed to be dead. Midway along the street was a modern prison, whose horrid yellow wall in no wise enlivened the scene, whilst, overhead, a flight of telegraph wires stretched from the arcades of the Farnese palace to the distant vista of trees beyond the river. With its infrequent traffic the street, even in the daytime, was like some sepulchral corridor where the past was crumbling into dust, and when night fell its desolation quite appalled Pierre. You did not meet a soul, you did not see a light in any window, and the glimmering gas lamps, few and far between, seemed powerless to pierce the gloom. On either hand the doors were barred and bolted, and not a sound, not a breath came from within. Even when, after a long interval, you passed a lighted wine-shop, behind whose panes of frosted glass a lamp gleamed dim and motionless, not an exclamation, not a suspicion of a laugh ever reached

your ear. There was nothing alive save the two sentries placed outside the prison, one before the entrance and the other at the corner of the right-hand lane, and they remained erect and still, coagulated, as it were, in that dead street.

Pierre's interest, however, was not merely confined to the Via Giulia; it extended to the whole district, once so fine and fashionable, but now fallen into sad decay, far removed from modern life, and exhaling a faint musty odour of monasticism. Towards San Giovanni dei Fiorentini, where the new Corso Vittorio Emanuele has ripped up every olden district, the lofty five-storeyed houses with their dazzling sculptured fronts contrasted violently with the black sunken dwellings of the neighbouring lanes. In the evening the globes of the electric lamps on the Corso shone out with such dazzling whiteness that the gas lamps of the Via Giulia and other streets looked like smoky lanterns. There were several old and famous thoroughfares, the Via Banchi Vecchi, the Via del Pellegrino, the Via di Monserrato, and an infinity of cross-streets which intersected and connected the others, all going towards the Tiber, and for the most part so narrow that vehicles scarcely had room to pass. And each street had its church, a multitude of churches all more or less alike, highly decorated, gilded, and painted, and open only at service time when they were full of sunlight and incense. In the Via Giulia, in addition to San Giovanni dei Fiorentini, San Biagio della Pagnotta, San Eligio degli Orefici, and three or four others, there was the so-called Church of the Dead, Santa Maria dell' Orazione; and this church, which is at the

lower end behind the Farnese palace, was often visited by Pierre, who liked to dream there of the wild life of Rome, and of the pious brothers of the Confraternita della Morte, who officiate there, and whose mission is to search for and bury such poor outcasts as die in the Campagna. One evening he was present at the funeral of two unknown men, whose bodies, after remaining unburied for quite a fortnight, had been discovered in a field near the Appian Way.

However, Pierre's favourite promenade soon became the new quay of the Tiber beyond the Palazzo Boccanera. He had merely to take the narrow lane skirting the mansion to reach a spot where he found much food for reflection. Although the quay was not yet finished, the work seemed to be quite abandoned. There were heaps of rubbish, blocks of stone, broken fences, and dilapidated tool-sheds all around. To such a height had it been necessary to carry the quay walls — designed to protect the city from floods, for the river bed has been rising for centuries past — that the old terrace of the Boccanera gardens, with its double flight of steps to which pleasure boats had once been moored, now lay in a hollow, threatened with annihilation whenever the works should be finished. But nothing had yet been levelled; the soil, brought thither for making up the bank, lay as it had fallen from the carts, and on all sides were pits and mounds interspersed with the abandoned building materials. Wretched urchins came to play there, workmen without work slept in the sunshine, and women after washing ragged linen spread it out to dry upon the stones. Nevertheless the spot proved a happy, peace-

ful refuge for Pierre, one fruitful in inexhaustible reveries when for hours at a time he lingered gazing at the river, the quays, and the city, stretching in front of him and on either hand.

At eight in the morning the sun already gilded the vast opening. On turning to the left he perceived the roofs of the Trastevere, of a misty, bluish grey against the dazzling sky. Then, just beyond the apse of San Giovanni, on the right, the river curved, and on its other bank the poplars of the Ospedale di Santo Spirito formed a green curtain, while the castle of Sant' Angelo showed brightly in the distance. But Pierre's eyes dwelt more particularly on the bank just in front of him, for there he found some lingering vestiges of old Rome. On that side indeed between the Ponte Sisto and the Ponte Sant' Angelo, the quays, which were to imprison the river within high, white, fortress-like walls, had not yet been raised, and the bank with its remnants of the old papal city conjured up an extraordinary vision of the middle ages. The houses, descending to the river brink, were cracked, scorched, rusted by innumerable burning summers, like so many antique bronzes. Down below there were black vaults into which the water flowed, piles upholding walls, and fragments of Roman stone-work plunging into the river bed; then, rising from the shore, came steep, broken stairways, green with moisture, tiers of terraces, storeys with tiny windows pierced here and there in hap-hazard fashion, houses perched atop of other houses, and the whole jumbled together with a fantastic commingling of balconies and wooden galleries, footbridges span-

ning courtyards, clumps of trees growing apparently on the very roofs, and attics rising from amidst pinky tiles. The contents of a drain fell noisily into the river from a worn and soiled gorge of stone; and wherever the houses stood back and the bank appeared, it was covered with wild vegetation, weeds, shrubs, and mantling ivy, which trailed like a kingly robe of state. And in the glory of the sun the wretchedness and dirt vanished, the crooked, jumbled houses seemed to be of gold, draped with the purple of the red petticoats and the dazzling white of the shifts which hung drying from their windows; while higher still, above the district, the Janiculum rose into all the luminary's dazzlement, uprearing the slender profile of Sant' Onofrio amidst cypresses and pines.

Leaning on the parapet of the quay wall, Pierre sadly gazed at the Tiber for hours at a time. Nothing could convey an idea of the weariness of those old waters, the mournful slowness of their flow along that Babylonian trench where they were confined within huge, bare, livid prison-like walls. In the sunlight their yellowness was gilded, and the faint quiver of the current brought ripples of green and blue; but as soon as the shade spread over it the stream became opaque like mud, so turbid in its venerable old age that it no longer even gave back a reflection of the houses lining it. And how desolate was its abandonment, what a stream of silence and solitude it was! After the winter rains it might roll furiously and threateningly, but during the long months of bright weather it traversed Rome without a sound, and Pierre could remain there all day long without see-

ing either a skiff or a sail. The two or three little steam-boats which arrived from the coast, the few tartanes which brought wine from Sicily, never came higher than the Aventine, beyond which there was only a watery desert in which here and there, at long intervals, a motionless angler let his line dangle. All that Pierre ever saw in the way of shipping was a sort of ancient, covered pinnace, a rotting Noah's ark, moored on the right beside the old bank, and he fancied that it might be used as a washhouse, though on no occasion did he see any one in it. And on a neck of mud there also lay a stranded boat with one side broken in, a lamentable symbol of the impossibility and the relinquishment of navigation. Ah! that decay of the river, that decay of father Tiber, as dead as the famous ruins whose dust he is weary of laving! And what an evocation! all the centuries of history, so many things, so many men, that those yellow waters have reflected till, full of lassitude and disgust, they have grown heavy, silent and deserted, longing only for annihilation.

One morning on the river bank Pierre found La Pierina standing behind an abandoned tool-shed. With her neck extended, she was looking fixedly at the window of Dario's room, at the corner of the quay and the lane. Doubtless she had been frightened by Victorine's severe reception, and had not dared to return to the mansion; but some servant, possibly, had told her which was the young Prince's window, and so she now came to this spot, where without wearying she waited for a glimpse of the man she loved, for some sign of life and salvation, the mere

hope of which made her heart leap. Deeply touched by the way in which she hid herself, all humility and quivering with adoration, the priest approached her, and instead of scolding her and driving her away as he had been asked to do, spoke to her in a gentle, cheerful manner, asking her for news of her people as though nothing had happened, and at last contriving to mention Dario's name in order that she might understand that he would be up and about again within a fortnight. On perceiving Pierre, La Pierina had started with timidity and distrust as if anxious to flee; but when she understood him, tears of happiness gushed from her eyes, and with a bright smile she kissed her hand to him, calling: "*Grazie, grazie, thanks, thanks!*" And thereupon she darted away, and he never saw her again.

On another morning at an early hour, as Pierre was going to say mass at Santa Brigida on the Piazza Farnese, he was surprised to meet Benedetta coming out of the church and carrying a small phial of oil. She evinced no embarrassment, but frankly told him that every two or three days she went thither to obtain from the beadle a few drops of the oil used for the lamp that burnt before an antique wooden statue of the Madonna, in which she had perfect confidence. She even confessed that she had never had confidence in any other Madonna, having never obtained anything from any other, though she had prayed to several of high repute, Madonnas of marble and even of silver. And so her heart was full of ardent devotion for the holy image which refused her nothing. And she declared in all simplicity, as though the matter

were quite natural and above discussion, that the few drops of oil which she applied, morning and evening, to Dario's wound, were alone working his cure, so speedy a cure as to be quite miraculous. Pierre, fairly aghast, distressed indeed to find such childish, superstitious notions in one so full of sense and grace and passion, did not even venture to smile.

In the evenings, when he came back from his strolls and spent an hour or so in Dario's room, he would for a time divert the patient by relating what he had done and seen and thought of during the day. And when he again ventured to stray beyond the district, and became enamoured of the lovely gardens of Rome, which he visited as soon as they opened in the morning in order that he might be virtually alone, he delighted the young prince and Benedetta with his enthusiasm, his rapturous passion for the splendid trees, the plashing water, and the spreading terraces whence the views were so sublime. It was not the most extensive of these gardens which the more deeply impressed his heart. In the grounds of the Villa Borghese, the little Roman Bois de Boulogne, there were certainly some majestic clumps of greenery, some regal avenues where carriages took a turn in the afternoon before the obligatory drive to the Pincio; but Pierre was more touched by the reserved garden of the villa — that villa dazzling with marble and now containing one of the finest museums in the world. There was a simple lawn of fine grass with a vast central basin surmounted by a figure of Venus, nude and white; and antique fragments, vases, statues, columns, and sarcophagi were ranged symmetrically all

around the deserted, sunlit yet melancholy, sward. On returning on one occasion to the Pincio Pierre spent a delightful morning there, penetrated by the charm of this little nook with its scanty evergreens, and its admirable vista of all Rome and St. Peter's rising up afar off in the soft limpid radiance. At the Villa Albani and the Villa Pamphili he again came upon superb parasol pines, tall, stately, and graceful, and powerful elm-trees with twisted limbs and dusky foliage. In the Pamphili grounds, the elm-trees steeped the paths in a delicious half-light, the lake with its weeping willows and tufts of reeds had a dreamy aspect, while down below the *parterre* displayed a fantastic floral mosaic bright with the various hues of flowers and foliage. That which most particularly struck Pierre, however, in this, the noblest, most spacious, and most carefully tended garden of Rome, was the novel and unexpected view that he suddenly obtained of St. Peter's, whilst skirting a low wall: a view whose symbolism for ever clung to him. Rome had completely vanished, and between the slopes of Monte Mario and another wooded height which hid the city, there only appeared the colossal dome which seemed to be poised on an infinity of scattered blocks, now white, now red. These were the houses of the Borgo, the jumbled piles of the Vatican and the Basilica which the huge dome surmounted and annihilated, showing greyly blue in the light blue of the heavens, whilst far away stretched a delicate, boundless vista of the Campagna, likewise of a bluish tint.

It was, however, more particularly in the less sumptuous gardens, those of a more homely grace, that

Pierre realised that even things have souls. Ah! that Villa Mattei on one side of the Coelius with its terraced grounds, its sloping alleys edged with laurel, aloe, and spindle tree, its box-plants forming arbours, its oranges, its roses, and its fountains! Pierre spent some delicious hours there, and only found a similar charm on visiting the Aventine, where three churches are embowered in verdure. The little garden of Santa Sabina, the birthplace of the Dominican order, is closed on all sides and affords no view: it slumbers in quiescence, warm and perfumed by its orange-trees, amongst which that planted by St. Dominic stands huge and gnarled but still laden with ripe fruit. At the adjoining Priorato, however, the garden, perched high above the Tiber, overlooks a vast expanse, with the river and the buildings on either bank as far as the summit of the Janiculum. And in these gardens of Rome Pierre ever found the same clipped box-shrubs, the same eucalypti with white trunks and pale leaves long like hair, the same ilex-trees squat and dusky, the same giant pines, the same black cypresses, the same marbles whitening amidst tufts of roses, and the same fountains gurgling under mantling ivy. Never did he enjoy more gentle, sorrow-tinged delight than at the Villa of Pope Julius, where all the life of a gay and sensual period is suggested by the semi-circular porticus opening on the gardens, a porticus decorated with paintings, golden trellis-work laden with flowers, amidst which flutter flights of smiling Cupids. Then, on the evening when he returned from the Farnesina, he declared that he had brought all the dead soul of ancient Rome away with him, and it was not the paintings

executed after Raffaëlle's designs that had touched him, it was rather the pretty hall on the river side decorated in soft blue and pink and lilac, with an art devoid of genius yet so charming and so Roman; and in particular it was the abandoned garden once stretching down to the Tiber, and now shut off from it by the new quay, and presenting an aspect of woful desolation, ravaged, bossy and weedy like a cemetery, albeit the golden fruit of orange and citron tree still ripened there.

And for the last time a shock came to Pierre's heart on the lovely evening when he visited the Villa Medici. There he was on French soil.¹ And again what a marvellous garden he found with box-plants, and pines, and avenues full of magnificence and charm! What a refuge for antique reverie was that wood of ilex-trees, so old and so sombre, where the sun in declining cast fiery gleams of red gold amidst the sheeny bronze of the foliage. You ascend by endless steps, and from the crowning belvedere on high you embrace all Rome at a glance as though by opening your arms you could seize it in its entirety. From the villa's dining-room, decorated with portraits of all the artists who have successfully sojourned there, and from the spacious peaceful library one beholds the same splendid, broad, all-conquering panorama, a panorama of unlimited ambition, whose infinite ought to set in the hearts of the young men dwelling there a determination to subju-

¹ Here is the French Academy, where winners of the "Prix de Rome" in painting, sculpture, architecture, engraving, and music are maintained by the French Government for three years. The creation dates from Louis XIV. — *Trans.*

gate the world. Pierre, who came thither opposed to the principle of the "Prix de Rome," that traditional, uniform education so dangerous for originality, was for a moment charmed by the warm peacefulness, the limpid solitude of the garden, and the sublime horizon where the wings of genius seemed to flutter. Ah! how delightful, to be only twenty and to live for three years amidst such infinite sweetness, encompassed by the finest works of man; to say to oneself that one is as yet too young to produce, and to reflect, and seek, and learn how to enjoy, suffer, and love! But Pierre afterwards reflected that this was not a fit task for youth, and that to appreciate the divine enjoyment of such a retreat, all art and blue sky, ripe age was needed, age with victories already gained and weariness following upon the accomplishment of work. He chatted with some of the young pensioners, and remarked that if those who were inclined to dreaminess and contemplation, like those who could merely claim mediocrity, accommodated themselves to this life cloistered in the art of the past, on the other hand artists of active bent and personal temperament pined with impatience, their eyes ever turned towards Paris, their souls eager to plunge into the furnace of battle and production.

All those gardens of which Pierre spoke to Dario and Benedetta with so much rapture, awoke within them the memory of the garden of the Villa Montefiori, now a waste, but once so green, planted with the finest orange-trees of Rome, a grove of centenarian orange-trees where they had learnt to love one another. And the memory of their early love brought thoughts

of their present situation and their future prospects. To these the conversation always reverted, and even-
ing after evening Pierre witnessed their delight, and heard them talk of coming happiness like lovers transported to the seventh heaven. The suit for the dissolution of Benedetta's marriage was now assuming a more and more favourable aspect. Guided by a powerful hand, Donna Serafina was apparently acting very vigorously, for almost every day she had some further good news to report. She was indeed anxious to finish the affair both for the continuity and for the honour of the name, for on the one hand Dario refused to marry any one but his cousin, and on the other this marriage would explain everything and put an end to an intolerable situation. The scandalous rumours which circulated both in the white and the black world quite incensed her, and a victory was the more necessary as Leo XIII, already so aged, might be snatched away at any moment, and in the Conclave which would follow she desired that her brother's name should shine forth with untarnished, sovereign radiance. Never had the secret ambition of her life, the hope that her race might give a third pope to the Church, filled her with so much passion. It was as if she therein sought a consolation for the harsh abandonment of Advocate Morano. Invariably clad in sombre garb, ever active and slim, so tightly laced that from behind one might have taken her for a young girl, she was so to say the black soul of that old palace; and Pierre, who met her everywhere, prowling and inspecting like a careful house-keeper, and jealously watching over her brother the Cardinal,

bowed to her in silence, chilled to the heart by the stern look of her withered wrinkled face in which was set the large, opiniative nose of her family. However she barely returned his bows, for she still disdained that paltry foreign priest, and only tolerated him in order to please Monsignor Nani and Viscount Philibert de la Choue.

A witness every evening of the anxious delight and impatience of Benedetta and Dario, Pierre by degrees became almost as impassioned as themselves, as desirous for an early solution. Benedetta's suit was about to come before the Congregation of the Council once more. Monsignor Palma, the defender of the marriage, had demanded a supplementary inquiry after the favourable decision arrived at in the first instance by a bare majority of one vote — a majority which the Pope would certainly not have thought sufficient had he been asked for his ratification. So the question now was to gain votes among the ten cardinals who formed the Congregation, to persuade and convince them, and if possible ensure an almost unanimous pronouncement. The task was arduous, for, instead of facilitating matters, Benedetta's relationship to Cardinal Boccanera raised many difficulties, owing to the intriguing spirit rife at the Vatican, the spite of rivals who, by perpetuating the scandal, hoped to destroy Boccanera's chance of ever attaining to the papacy. Every afternoon, however, Donna Serafina devoted herself to the task of winning votes under the direction of her confessor, Father Lorenza, whom she saw daily at the Collegio Germanico, now the last refuge of the Jesuits in Rome, for they have

ceased to be masters of the Gesù. The chief hope of success lay in Prada's formal declaration that he would not put in an appearance. The whole affair wearied and irritated him; the imputations levelled against him as a man, seemed to him supremely odious and ridiculous; and he no longer even took the trouble to reply to the assignations which were sent to him. He acted indeed as if he had never been married, though deep in his heart the wound dealt to his passion and his pride still lingered, bleeding afresh whenever one or another of the scandalous rumours in circulation reached his ears. However, as their adversary desisted from all action, one can understand that the hopes of Benedetta and Dario increased, the more so as hardly an evening passed without Donna Serafina telling them that she believed she had gained the support of another cardinal.

But the man who terrified them all was Monsignor Palma, whom the Congregation had appointed to defend the sacred ties of matrimony. His rights and privileges were almost unlimited, he could appeal yet again, and in any case would make the affair drag on as long as it pleased him. His first report, in reply to Morano's memoir, had been a terrible blow, and it was now said that a second one which he was preparing would prove yet more pitiless, establishing as a fundamental principle of the Church that it could not annul a marriage whose nonconsummation was purely and simply due to the action of the wife in refusing obedience to her husband. In presence of such energy and logic, it was unlikely that the cardinals, even if sympathetic, would dare to advise the Holy Father to dissolve the mar-

riage. And so discouragement was once more overcoming Benedetta when Donna Serafina, on returning from a visit to Monsignor Nani, calmed her somewhat by telling her that a mutual friend had undertaken to deal with Monsignor Palma. However, said she, even if they succeeded, it would doubtless cost them a large sum.

Monsignor Palma, a theologist expert in all canonical affairs, and a perfectly honest man in pecuniary matters, had met with a great misfortune in his life. He had a niece, a poor and lovely girl, for whom, unhappily, in his declining years he conceived an insensate passion, with the result that to avoid a scandal he was compelled to marry her to a rascal who now preyed upon her and even beat her. And the prelate was now passing through a fearful crisis, weary of reducing himself to beggary, and indeed no longer having the money necessary to extricate his nephew by marriage from a very nasty predicament, the result of cheating at cards. So the idea was to save the young man by a considerable pecuniary payment, and then to procure him employment without asking aught of his uncle, who, as if offering complicity, came in tears one evening, when night had fallen, to thank Donna Serafina for her exceeding goodness.

Pierre was with Dario that evening when Benedetta entered the room, laughing and joyfully clapping her hands. "It's done, it's done!" she said, "he has just left aunt, and vowed eternal gratitude to her. He will now be obliged to show himself amiable."

However Dario distrustfully inquired: "But was

he made to sign anything, did he enter into a formal engagement?"

"Oh! no; how could one do that? It's such a delicate matter," replied Benedetta. "But people say that he is a very honest man." Nevertheless, in spite of these words, she herself became uneasy. What if Monsignor Palma should remain incorruptible in spite of the great service which had been rendered him? Thenceforth this idea haunted them, and their suspense began once more.

Dario, eager to divert his mind, was imprudent enough to get up before he was perfectly cured, and, his wound reopening, he was obliged to take to his bed again for a few days. Every evening, as previously, Pierre strove to enliven him with an account of his strolls. The young priest was now getting bolder, rambling in turn through all the districts of Rome, and discovering the many "classical" curiosities catalogued in the guide-books. One evening he spoke with a kind of affection of the principal squares of the city which he had first thought commonplace, but which now seemed to him very varied, each with original features of its own. There was the noble Piazza del Popolo of such monumental symmetry and so full of sunlight; there was the Piazza di Spagna, the lively meeting-place of foreigners, with its double flight of a hundred and thirty steps gilded by the sun; there was the vast Piazza Colonna, always swarming with people, and the most Italian of all the Roman squares from the presence of the idle, careless crowd which ever lounged round the column of Marcus Aurelius as if waiting for fortune to fall from heaven;

there was also the long and regular Piazza Navona, deserted since the market was no longer held there, and retaining a melancholy recollection of its former bustling life; and there was the Campo dei Fiori, which was invaded each morning by the tumultuous fruit and vegetable markets, quite a plantation of huge umbrellas sheltering heaps of tomatoes, pimentoes, and grapes amidst a noisy stream of dealers and housewives. Pierre's great surprise, however, was the Piazza del Campidoglio — the "Square of the Capitol" — which to him suggested a summit, an open spot overlooking the city and the world, but which he found to be small and square, and on three sides enclosed by palaces, whilst on the fourth side the view was of little extent.¹ There are no passers-by there; visitors usually come up by a flight of steps bordered by a few palm-trees, only foreigners making use of the winding carriage-ascent. The vehicles wait, and the tourists loiter for a while with their eyes raised to the admirable equestrian statue of Marcus Aurelius, in antique bronze, which occupies the centre of the piazza. Towards four o'clock, when the sun gilds the left-hand palace, and the slender statues of its entablature show vividly against the blue sky, you might think yourself in some warm cosy square of a little provincial town, what with the women of the neighbourhood who sit knitting under the arcade, and the bands of ragged urchins who dis-

¹ The Piazza del Campidoglio is really a depression between the Capitolium proper and the northern height called the Arx. It is supposed to have been the exact site of Romulus's traditional Asylum. — *Trans.*

port themselves on all sides like school-boys in a playground.

Then, on another evening Pierre told Benedetta and Dario of his admiration for the Roman fountains, for in no other city of the world does water flow so abundantly and magnificently in fountains of bronze and marble, from the boat-shaped Fontana della Barcaccia on the Piazza di Spagna, the Triton on the Piazza Barberini, and the Tortoises which give their name to the Piazza delle Tartarughe, to the three fountains of the Piazza Navona where Bernini's vast central composition of rock and river-gods rises so triumphantly, and to the colossal and pompous fountain of Trevi, where King Neptune stands on high attended by lofty figures of Health and Fruitfulness. And on yet another evening Pierre came home quite pleased, relating that he had at last discovered why it was that the old streets around the Capitol and along the Tiber seemed to him so strange: it was because they had no footways, and pedestrians, instead of skirting the walls, invariably took the middle of the road, leisurely wending their way among the vehicles. Pierre was very fond of those old districts with their winding lanes, their tiny squares so irregular in shape, and their huge square mansions swamped by a multitudinous jumble of little houses. He found a charm, too, in the district of the Esquiline, where, besides innumerable flights of ascending steps, each of grey pebbles edged with white stone, there were sudden sinuous slopes, tiers of terraces, seminaries and convents, lifeless, with their windows ever closed, and lofty, blank walls above which a

superb palm-tree would now and again soar into the spotless blue of the sky. And on yet another evening, having strolled into the Campagna beside the Tiber and above the Ponte Molle, he came back full of enthusiasm for a form of classical art which hitherto he had scarcely appreciated. Along the river bank, however, he had found the very scenery that Poussin so faithfully depicted: the sluggish, yellow stream fringed with reeds; low riven cliffs, whose chalky whiteness showed against the ruddy background of a far-stretching, undulating plain, bounded by blue hills; a few spare trees with a ruined porticus opening on to space atop of the bank, and a line of pale-hued sheep descending to drink, whilst the shepherd, with an elbow resting on the trunk of an ilex-tree, stood looking on. It was a special kind of beauty, broad and ruddy, made up of nothing, sometimes simplified into a series of low, horizontal lines, but ever ennobled by the great memories it evoked: the Roman legions marching along the paved highways across the bare Campagna; the long slumber of the middle ages; and then the awakening of antique nature in the midst of Catholicism, whereby, for the second time, Rome became ruler of the world.

One day when Pierre came back from seeing the great modern cemetery, the Campo Verano, he found Celia, as well as Benedetta, by the side of Dario's bed. "What, Monsieur l'Abbé!" exclaimed the little Princess when she learnt where he had been; "it amuses you to visit the dead?"

"Oh those Frenchmen," remarked Dario, to whom the mere idea of a cemetery was repulsive; "those

Frenchmen seem to take a pleasure in making their lives wretched with their partiality for gloomy scenes."

"But there is no escaping the reality of death," gently replied Pierre; "the best course is to look it in the face."

This made the Prince quite angry. "Reality, reality," said he, "when reality isn't pleasant I don't look at it; I try never to think of it even."

In spite of this rejoinder, Pierre, with his smiling, placid air, went on enumerating the things which had struck him: first, the admirable manner in which the cemetery was kept, then the festive appearance which it derived from the bright autumn sun, and the wonderful profusion in which marble was lavished in slabs, statues, and chapels. The ancient atavism had surely been at work, the sumptuous mausoleums of the Appian Way had here sprung up afresh, making death a pretext for the display of pomp and pride. In the upper part of the cemetery the Roman nobility had a district of its own, crowded with veritable temples, colossal statues, groups of several figures; and if at times the taste shown in these monuments was deplorable, it was none the less certain that millions had been expended on them. One charming feature of the place, said Pierre, was that the marbles, standing among yews and cypresses, were remarkably well preserved, white and spotless; for, if the summer sun slowly gilded them, there were none of those stains of moss and rain which impart an aspect of melancholy decay to the statues of northern climes.

Touched by the discomfort of Dario, Benedetta, hitherto silent, ended by interrupting Pierre. "And

was the hunt interesting?" she asked, turning to Celia.

The little Princess had been taken by her mother to see a fox-hunt, and had been speaking of it when the priest entered the room.

"Yes, it was very interesting, my dear," she replied; "the meet was at noon near the tomb of Cæcilia Metella, where a buffet had been arranged under a tent. And there was such a number of people—the foreign colony, the young men of the embassies, and some officers, not to mention ourselves—all the men in scarlet and a great many ladies in habits. The 'throw-off' was at one o'clock, and the gallop lasted more than two hours and a half, so that the fox had a very long run. I wasn't able to follow, but all the same I saw some extraordinary things—a great wall which the whole hunt had to leap, and then ditches and hedges—a mad race indeed in the rear of the hounds. There were two accidents, but nothing serious; one gentleman, who was unseated, sprained his wrist badly, and another broke his leg."¹

Dario had listened to Celia with passionate interest, for fox-hunting is one of the great pleasures of Rome, and the Campagna, flat and yet bristling with obstacles, is certainly well adapted to the sport. "Ah!" said the young Prince in a despairing tone, "how idiotic it is to be riveted to this room! I shall end by dying of *ennui*!"

¹ The Roman Hunt, which counts about one hundred subscribers, has flourished since 1840. There is a kennel of English hounds, an English huntsman and whip, and a stable of English hunters.—*Trans.*

Benedetta contented herself with smiling; neither reproach nor expression of sadness came from her at this candid display of egotism. Her own happiness at having him all to herself in the room where she nursed him was great indeed; still her love, at once full of youth and good sense, included a maternal element, and she well understood that he hardly amused himself, deprived as he was of his customary pleasures and severed from his friends, few of whom he was willing to receive, for he feared that they might think the story of the dislocated shoulder suspicious. Of course there were no more *fêtes*, no more evenings at the theatre, no more flirtations. But above everything else Dario missed the Corso, and suffered despairingly at no longer seeing or learning anything by watching the procession of Roman society from four to five each afternoon. Accordingly, as soon as an intimate called, there were endless questions: Had the visitor seen so and so? Had such a one reappeared? How had a certain friend's love affair ended? Was any new adventure setting the city agog? And so forth; all the petty frivolities, nine days' wonders, and puerile intrigues in which the young Prince had hitherto expended his manly energy.

After a pause Celia, who was fond of coming to him with innocent gossip, fixed her candid eyes on him—the fathomless eyes of an enigmatical virgin, and resumed: “How long it takes to set a shoulder right!”

Had she, child as she was, with love her only business, divined the truth? Dario in his embarrassment

glanced at Benedetta, who still smiled. However, the little Princess was already darting to another subject: "Ah! you know, Dario, at the Corso yesterday I saw a lady —" Then she stopped short, surprised and embarrassed that these words should have escaped her. However, in all bravery she resumed like one who had been a friend since childhood, sharing many a little love secret: "Yes, a very pretty person whom you know. Well, she had a bouquet of white roses with her all the same."

At this Benedetta indulged in a burst of frank merriment, and Dario, still looking at her, also laughed. She had twitted him during the early days because no young woman ever sent to make inquiries about him. For his part, he was not displeased with the rupture, for the continuance of the connection might have proved embarrassing; and so, although his vanity may have been slightly hurt, the news that he was already replaced in La Tonietta's affections was welcome rather than otherwise. "Ah!" he contented himself with saying, "the absent are always in the wrong."

"The man one loves is never absent," declared Celia with her grave, candid air.

However, Benedetta had stepped up to the bed to raise the young man's pillows: "Never mind, Dario mio," said she, "all those things are over; I mean to keep you, and you will only have me to love."

He gave her a passionate glance and kissed her hair. She spoke the truth: he had never loved any one but her, and she was not mistaken in her anticipation of keeping him always to herself alone, as soon as they should be wedded. To her great delight, since she

had been nursing him he had become quite childish again, such as he had been when she had learnt to love him under the orange-trees of the Villa Montefiori. He retained a sort of puerility, doubtless the outcome of impoverished blood, that return to childhood which one remarks amongst very ancient races; and he toyed on his bed with pictures, gazed for hours at photographs, which made him laugh. Moreover, his inability to endure suffering had yet increased; he wished Benedetta to be gay and sing, and amused her with his petty egotism which led him to dream of a life of continual joy with her. Ah! how pleasant it would be to live together and for ever in the sunlight, to do nothing and care for nothing, and even if the world should crumble somewhere to heed it not!

"One thing which greatly pleases me," suddenly said the young Prince, "is that Monsieur l'Abbé has ended by falling in love with Rome."

Pierre admitted it with a good grace.

"We told you so," remarked Benedetta. "A great deal of time is needed for one to understand and love Rome. If you had only stayed here for a fortnight you would have gone off with a deplorable idea of us, but now that you have been here for two full months we are quite at ease, for you will never think of us without affection."

She looked exceedingly charming as she spoke these words, and Pierre again bowed. However, he had already given thought to the phenomenon, and fancied he could explain it. When a stranger comes to Rome he brings with him a Rome of his own, a Rome such as he dreams of, so ennobled by imagina-

tion that the real Rome proves a terrible disenchantment. And so it is necessary to wait for habituation, for the mediocrity of the reality to soften, and for the imagination to have time to kindle again, and only behold things such as they are athwart the prodigious splendour of the past.

However, Celia had risen and was taking leave. "Good-bye, dear," she said; "I hope the wedding will soon take place. You know, Dario, that I mean to be betrothed before the end of the month. Oh yes, I intend to make my father give a grand entertainment. And how nice it would be if the two weddings could take place at the same time!"

Two days later, after a long ramble through the Trastevere district, followed by a visit to the Palazzo Farnese, Pierre felt that he could at last understand the terrible, melancholy truth about Rome. He had several times already strolled through the Trastevere, attracted towards its wretched denizens by his compassion for all who suffered. Ah! that quagmire of wretchedness and ignorance! He knew of abominable nooks in the faubourgs of Paris, frightful "rents" and "courts" where people rotted in heaps, but there was nothing in France to equal the listless, filthy stagnation of the Trastevere. On the brightest days a dank gloom chilled the sinuous, cellar-like lanes, and the smell of rotting vegetables, rank oil, and human animality brought on fits of nausea. Jumbled together in a confusion which artists of romantic turn would admire, the antique, irregular houses had black, gaping entrances diving below ground, outdoor stairways conducting to upper floors, and wooden balconies which

only a miracle upheld. There were crumbling fronts, shored up with beams; sordid lodgings whose filth and bareness could be seen through shattered windows; and numerous petty shops, all the open-air cook-stalls of a lazy race which never lighted a fire at home: you saw frying-shops with heaps of polenta, and fish swimming in stinking oil, and dealers in cooked vegetables displaying huge turnips, celery, cauliflowers, and spinach, all cold and sticky. The butcher's meat was black and clumsily cut up; the necks of the animals bristled with bloody clots, as though the heads had simply been torn away. The baker's loaves, piled on planks, looked like little round paving stones; at the beggarly greengrocers' merely a few pimentoes and fir-apples were shown under the strings of dry tomatoes which festooned the doorways; and the only shops which were at all attractive were those of the pork butchers with their salted provisions and their cheese, whose pungent smell slightly attenuated the pestilential reek of the gutters. Lottery offices, displaying lists of winning numbers, alternated with wine-shops, of which latter there was a fresh one every thirty yards with large inscriptions setting forth that the best wines of Genzano, Marino, and Frascati were to be found within. And the whole district teemed with ragged, grimy denizens, children half naked and devoured by vermin, bare-headed, gesticulating and shouting women, whose skirts were stiff with grease, old men who remained motionless on benches amidst swarms of hungry flies; idleness and agitation appearing on all sides, whilst cobblers sat on the sidewalks quietly plying their trade, and little donkeys pulled

carts hither and thither, and men drove turkeys along, whip in hand, and bands of beggars rushed upon the few anxious tourists who had timorously ventured into the district. At the door of a little tailor's shop an old house-pail dangled full of earth, in which a succulent plant was flowering. And from every window and balcony, as from the many cords which stretched across the street from house to house, all the household washing hung like bunting, nameless drooping rags, the symbolical banners of abominable misery.

Pierre's fraternal soul filled with pity at the sight. Ah! yes, it was necessary to demolish all those pestilential districts where the populace had wallowed for centuries as in a poisonous gaol! He was for demolition and sanitary improvement, even if old Rome were killed and artists scandalised. Doubtless the Trastevere was already greatly changed, pierced with several new thoroughfares which let the sun stream in. And amidst the *abattis* of rubbish and the spacious clearings, where nothing new had yet been erected, the remaining portions of the old district seemed even blacker and more loathsome. Some day, no doubt, it would all be rebuilt, but how interesting was this phase of the city's evolution: old Rome expiring and new Rome just dawning amidst countless difficulties! To appreciate the change it was necessary to have known the filthy Rome of the past, swamped by sewage in every form. The recently levelled Ghetto had, over a course of centuries, so rotted the soil on which it stood that an awful pestilential odour yet arose from its bare site. It was only fitting that it should long remain waste, so that it might dry and

become purified in the sun. In all the districts on either side of the Tiber where extensive improvements have been undertaken you find the same scenes. You follow some narrow, damp, evil-smelling street with black house-fronts and overhanging roofs, and suddenly come upon a clearing as in a forest of ancient leprous hovels. There are squares, broad footways; lofty white carved buildings yet in the rough, littered with rubbish and fenced off. On every side you find as it were a huge building yard, which the financial crisis perpetuates; the city of to-morrow arrested in its growth, stranded there in its monstrous, precocious, surprising infancy. Nevertheless, therein lies good and healthful work, such as was and is absolutely necessary if Rome is to become a great modern city, instead of being left to rot, to dwindle into a mere ancient curiosity, a museum show-piece.

That day, as Pierre went from the Trastevere to the Palazzo Farnese, where he was expected, he chose a roundabout route, following the Via di Pettinari and the Via dei Giubbonari, the former so dark and narrow with a great hospital wall on one side and a row of wretched houses on the other, and the latter animated by a constant stream of people and enlivened by the jewellers' windows, full of big gold chains, and the displays of the drapers' shops, where stuffs hung in bright red, blue, green, and yellow lengths. And the popular district through which he had roamed and the trading district which he was now crossing reminded him of the castle fields with their mass of workpeople reduced to mendicity by lack of employment and forced to camp in the superb, unfinished,

abandoned mansions. Ah! the poor, sad people, who were yet so childish, kept in the ignorance and credulity of a savage race by centuries of theocracy, so habituated to mental night and bodily suffering that even to-day they remained apart from the social awakening, simply desirous of enjoying their pride, indolence, and sunlight in peace! They seemed both blind and deaf in their decadence, and whilst Rome was being overturned they continued to lead the stagnant life of former times, realising nought but the worries of the improvements, the demolition of the old favourite districts, the consequent change in habits, and the rise in the cost of food, as if indeed they would rather have gone without light, cleanliness, and health, since these could only be secured by a great financial and labour crisis. And yet, at bottom, it was solely for the people, the populace, that Rome was being cleansed and rebuilt with the idea of making it a great modern capital, for democracy lies at the end of these present-day transformations; it is the people who will inherit the cities whence dirt and disease are being expelled, and where the law of labour will end by prevailing and killing want. And so, though one may curse the dusting and repairing of the ruins and the stripping of all the wild flora from the Colosseum, though one may wax indignant at sight of the hideous fortress-like ramparts which imprison the Tiber, and bewail the old romantic banks with their greenery and their antique dwellings dipping into the stream, one must at the same time acknowledge that life springs from death, and that to-morrow must perforce blossom in the dust of the past.

While thinking of all these things Pierre had reached the deserted, stern-looking Piazza Farnese, and for a moment he looked up at the bare monumental façade of the heavy square Palazzo, its lofty entrance where hung the tricolour, its rows of windows and its famous cornice sculptured with such marvellous art. Then he went in. A friend of Narcisse Habert, one of the *attachés* of the embassy to the King of Italy, was waiting for him, having offered to show him over the huge pile, the finest palace in Rome, which France had leased as a lodging for her ambassador.¹ Ah! that colossal, sumptuous, deadly dwelling, with its vast court whose porticus is so dark and damp, its giant staircase with low steps, its endless corridors, its immense galleries and halls. All was sovereign pomp blended with death. An icy, penetrating chill fell from the walls. With a discreet smile the *attaché* owned that the embassy was frozen in winter and baked in summer. The only part of the building which was at all lively and pleasant was the first storey, overlooking the Tiber, which the ambassador himself occupied. From the gallery there, containing the famous frescoes of Annibale Caracci, one can see the Janiculum, the Corsini gardens, and the Acqua Paola above San Pietro in Montorio. Then, after a vast drawing-room comes the study, peaceful and pleasant, and enlivened by sunshine. But the dining-room, the bed-chambers, and other apartments occupied by the *personnel* look out on to the mournful

¹ The French have two embassies at Rome: one at the Palazzo Farnese, to the Italian Court, and the other at the Palazzo Rospigliosi, to the Vatican. — *Trans.*

gloom of a side street. All these vast rooms, twenty and four-and-twenty feet high, have admirable carved or painted ceilings, bare walls, a few of them decorated with frescoes, and incongruous furniture, superb pier tables mingling with modern *bric-à-brac*. And things become abominable when you enter the gala reception-rooms overlooking the piazza, for there you no longer find an article of furniture, no longer a hanging, nothing but disaster, a series of magnificent deserted halls given over to rats and spiders. The embassy occupies but one of them, where it heaps up its dusty archives. Near by is a huge hall occupying the height of two floors, and thus sixty feet in elevation. Reserved by the owner of the palace, the ex-King of Naples, it has become a mere lumber-room where *maquettes*, unfinished statues, and a very fine sarcophagus are stowed away amidst all kinds of remnants. And this is but a part of the palace. The ground floor is altogether uninhabited; the French "École de Rome" occupies a corner of the second floor; while the embassy huddles in chilly fashion in the most habitable corner of the first floor, compelled to abandon everything else and lock the doors to spare itself the useless trouble of sweeping. No doubt it is grand to live in the Palazzo Farnese, built by Pope Paul III and for more than a century inhabited by cardinals; but how cruel the discomfort and how frightful the melancholy of this huge ruin, three-fourths of whose rooms are dead, useless, impossible, cut off from life. And the evenings, oh! the evenings, when porch, court, stairs, and corridors are invaded by dense gloom, against which a few smoky

gas lamps struggle in vain, when a long, long journey lies before one through the lugubrious desert of stone, before one reaches the ambassador's warm and cheerful drawing-room !

Pierre came away quite aghast. And, as he walked along, the many other grand palaces which he had seen during his strolls rose before him, one and all of them stripped of their splendour, shorn of their princely establishments, let out in uncomfortable flats ! What could be done with those grandiose galleries and halls now that no fortune could defray the cost of the pompous life for which they had been built, or even feed the retinue needed to keep them up ? Few indeed were the nobles who, like Prince Aldobrandini, with his numerous progeny, still occupied their entire mansions. Almost all of them let the antique dwellings of their forefathers to companies or individual tenants, reserving only a storey, and at times a mere lodging in some dark corner, for themselves. The Palazzo Chigi was let : the ground floor to bankers and the first floor to the Austrian ambassador, while the Prince and his family divided the second floor with a cardinal. The Palazzo Schiarra was let : the first floor to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the second to a senator, while the Prince and his mother merely occupied the ground floor. The Palazzo Barberini was let : its ground floor, first floor, and second floor to various families, whilst the Prince found a refuge on the third floor in the rooms which had been occupied by his ancestors' lackeys. The Palazzo Borghese was let : the ground floor to a dealer in antiquities, the first floor to a Lodge of Freemasons,

and the rest to various households, whilst the Prince only retained the use of a small suite of apartments. And the Palazzo Odescalchi, the Palazzo Colonna, the Palazzo Doria were let: their Princes reduced to the position of needy landlords eager to derive as much profit as possible from their property in order to make both ends meet. A blast of ruin was sweeping over the Roman *patriziato*, the greatest fortunes had crumbled in the financial crisis, very few remained wealthy, and what a wealth it was, stagnant and dead, which neither commerce nor industry could renew. The numerous princes who had tried speculation were stripped of their fortunes. The others, terrified, called upon to pay enormous taxes, amounting to nearly one-third of their incomes, could henceforth only wait and behold their last stagnant millions dwindle away till they were exhausted or distributed according to the succession laws. Such wealth as remained to these nobles must perish, for, like everything else, wealth perishes when it lacks a soil in which it may fructify. In all this there was solely a question of time: eventual ruin was a foregone and irremediable conclusion, of absolute, historical certainty. Those who resigned themselves to the course of letting their deserted mansions still struggled for life, seeking to accommodate themselves to present-day exigencies; whilst death already dwelt among the others, those stubborn, proud ones who immured themselves in the tombs of their race, like that appalling Palazzo Boccanera, which was falling into dust amidst such chilly gloom and silence, the latter only broken at long intervals when the Cardinal's old coach rumbled over the grassy court.

The point which most struck Pierre, however, was that his visits to the Trastevere and the Palazzo Farnese shed light one on the other, and led him to a conclusion which had never previously seemed so manifest. As yet no "people," and soon no aristocracy. He had found the people so wretched, ignorant, and resigned in its long infancy induced by historic and climatic causes that many years of instruction and culture were necessary for it to become a strong, healthy, and laborious democracy, conscious of both its rights and its duties. As for the aristocracy, it was dwindling to death in its crumbling palaces, no longer aught than a finished, degenerate race, with such an admixture also of American, Austrian, Polish, and Spanish blood that pure Roman blood became a rare exception ; and, moreover, it had ceased to belong either to sword or gown, unwilling to serve constitutional Italy and forsaking the Sacred College, where only *parvenus* now donned the purple. And between the lowly and the aristocracy there was as yet no firmly seated middle class, with the vigour of fresh sap and sufficient knowledge and good sense to act as the transitional educator of the nation. The middle class was made up in part of the old servants and clients of the princes, the farmers who rented their lands, the stewards, notaries, and solicitors who managed their fortunes ; in part, too, of all the employees, the functionaries of every rank and class, the deputies and senators, whom the new Government had brought from the provinces ; and, in particular, of the voracious hawks who had swooped down upon Rome, the Pradas, the men of prey from all parts of the kingdom, who with beak and talon devoured

both people and aristocracy. For whom, then, had one laboured? For whom had those gigantic works of new Rome been undertaken? A shudder of fear sped by, a crack as of doom was heard, arousing pitiful disquietude in every fraternal heart. Yes, a threat of doom and annihilation: as yet no people, soon no aristocracy, and only a ravenous middle class, quarrying, vulture-like, among the ruins.

On the evening of that day, when all was dark, Pierre went to spend an hour on the river quay beyond the Boccanera mansion. He was very fond of meditating on that deserted spot in spite of the warnings of Victorine, who asserted that it was not safe. And, indeed, on such inky nights as that one, no cut-throat place ever presented a more tragic aspect. Not a soul, not a passer-by; a dense gloom, a void in front and on either hand. At a corner of the mansion, now steeped in darkness, there was a gas lamp which stood in a hollow since the river margin had been banked up, and this lamp cast an uncertain glimmer upon the quay, level with the latter's bossy soil. Thus long vague shadows stretched from the various materials, piles of bricks and piles of stone, which were strewn around. On the right a few lights shone upon the bridge near San Giovanni and in the windows of the hospital of the Santo Spirito. On the left, amidst the dim recession of the river, the distant districts were blotted out. Then yonder, across the stream, was the Trastevere, the houses on the bank looking like vague, pale phantoms, with infrequent window-panes showing a blurred yellow glimmer, whilst on high only a dark band shadowed the Janiculum, near whose summit the

lamps of some promenade scintillated like a triangle of stars. But it was the Tiber which impassioned Pierre; such was its melancholy majesty during those nocturnal hours. Leaning over the parapet, he watched it gliding between the new walls, which looked like those of some black and monstrous prison built for a giant. So long as lights gleamed in the windows of the houses opposite he saw the sluggish water flow by, showing slow, moire-like ripples there where the quivering reflections endowed it with a mysterious life. And he often mused on the river's famous past and evoked the legends which assert that fabulous wealth lies buried in its muddy bed. At each fresh invasion of the barbarians, and particularly when Rome was sacked, the treasures of palaces and temples are said to have been cast into the water to prevent them from falling into the hands of the conquerors. Might not those golden bars trembling yonder in the glaucous stream be the branches of the famous candelabrum which Titus brought from Jerusalem? Might not those pale patches whose shape remained uncertain amidst the frequent eddies indicate the white marble of statues and columns? And those deep moires glittering with little flamelets, were they not promiscuous heaps of precious metal, cups, vases, ornaments enriched with gems? What a dream was that of the swarming riches espied athwart the old river's bosom, of the hidden life of the treasures which were said to have slumbered there for centuries; and what a hope for the nation's pride and enrichment centred in the miraculous finds which might be made in the Tiber if one could some day dry it up and search its bed, as

had already been suggested! Therein, perchance, lay Rome's new fortune.

However, on that black night, whilst Pierre leant over the parapet, it was stern reality alone which occupied his mind. He was still pursuing the train of thought suggested by his visits to the Trastevere and the Farnese palace, and in presence of that lifeless water was coming to the conclusion that the selection of Rome for transformation into a modern capital was the great misfortune to which the sufferings of young Italy were due. He knew right well that the selection had been inevitable: Rome being the queen of glory, the antique ruler of the world to whom eternity had been promised, and without whom the national unity had always seemed an impossibility. And so the problem was a terrible one, since without Rome Italy could not exist, and with Rome it seemed difficult for it to exist. Ah! that dead river, how it symbolised disaster! Not a boat upon its surface, not a quiver of the commercial and industrial activity of those waters which bear life to the very hearts of great modern cities! There had been fine schemes, no doubt — Rome a seaport, gigantic works, canalisation to enable vessels of heavy tonnage to come up to the Aventine; but these were mere delusions; the authorities would scarcely be able to clear the river mouth, which deposits were continually choking. And there was that other cause of mortal languishment, the Campagna — the desert of death which the dead river crossed and which girdled Rome with sterility. There was talk of draining and planting it; much futile discussion on the question whether it had been fertile in the days

of the old Romans; and even a few experiments were made; but, all the same, Rome remained in the midst of a vast cemetery like a city of other times, for ever separated from the modern world by that *lande* or moor where the dust of centuries had accumulated. The geographical considerations which once gave the city the empire of the world no longer exist. The centre of civilisation has been displaced. The basin of the Mediterranean has been divided among powerful nations. In Italy all roads now lead to Milan, the city of industry and commerce, and Rome is but a town of passage. And so the most valiant efforts have failed to rouse it from its invincible slumber. The capital which the newcomers sought to improvise with such extreme haste has remained unfinished, and has almost ruined the nation. The Government, legislators, and functionaries only camp there, fleeing directly the warm weather sets in so as to escape the pernicious climate. The hotels and shops even put up their shutters, and the streets and promenades become deserts, the city having failed to acquire any life of its own, and relapsing into death as soon as the artificial life instilled into it is withdrawn. So all remains in suspense in this purely decorative capital, where only a fresh growth of men and money can finish and people the huge useless piles of the new districts. If it be true that to-morrow always blooms in the dust of the past, one ought to force oneself to hope; but Pierre asked himself if the soil were not exhausted, and since mere buildings could no longer grow on it, if it were not for ever drained of the sap which makes a race healthy, a nation powerful.

As the night advanced the lights in the houses of the Trastevere went out one by one: yet Pierre for a long time lingered on the quay, leaning over the blackened river and yielding to hopelessness. There was now no distance to the gloom; all had become dense; no longer did any reflections set a moire-like, golden quiver in the water, or reveal beneath its mystery-concealing current a fantastic, dancing vision of fabulous wealth. Gone was the legend, gone the seven-branched golden candelabrum, gone the golden vases, gone the golden jewellery, the whole dream of antique treasure that had vanished into night, even like the antique glory of Rome. Not a glimmer, nothing but slumber, disturbed solely by the heavy fall of sewage from the drain on the right-hand, which could not be seen. The very water had disappeared, and Pierre no longer espied its leaden flow through the darkness, no longer had any perception of the sluggish senility, the long-dating weariness, the intense sadness of that ancient and glorious Tiber, whose waters now rolled nought but death. Only the vast, opulent sky, the eternal, pompous sky displayed the dazzling life of its milliards of planets above that river of darkness, bearing away the ruins of wellnigh three thousand years.

Before returning to his own chamber that evening Pierre entered Dario's room, and found Victorine there preparing things for the night. And as soon as she heard where he had been she raised her voice in protest: "What! you have again been to the quay at this time of night, Monsieur l'Abbé? You want to get a good knife thrust yourself, it seems. Well, for

my part, I certainly wouldn't take the air at such a late hour in this dangerous city." Then, with her wonted familiarity, she turned and spoke to the Prince, who was lying back in an arm-chair and smiling: "That girl, La Pierina," she said, "hasn't been back here, but all the same I've lately seen her prowling about among the building materials."

Dario raised his hand to silence her, and, addressing Pierre, exclaimed: "But you spoke to her, didn't you? It's becoming idiotic! Just fancy that brute Tito coming back to dig his knife into my other shoulder—"

All at once he paused, for he had just perceived Benedetta standing there and listening to him; she had slipped into the room a moment previously in order to wish him good-night. At sight of her his embarrassment was great indeed; he wished to speak, explain his words, and swear that he was wholly innocent in the affair. But she, with a smiling face, contented herself with saying, "I knew all about it, Dario mio. I am not so foolish as not to have thought it all over and understood the truth. If I ceased questioning you it was because I knew, and loved you all the same."

The young woman looked very happy as she spoke, and for this she had good cause, for that very evening she had learnt that Monsignor Palma had shown himself grateful for the service rendered to his nephew by laying a fresh and favourable memoir on the marriage affair before the Congregation of the Council. He had been unwilling to recall his previous opinions so far as to range himself completely on the Contes-

sina's side, but the certificates of two doctors whom she had recently seen had enabled him to conclude that her own declarations were accurate. And gliding over the question of wifely obedience, on which he had previously laid stress, he had skilfully set forth the reasons which made a dissolution of the marriage desirable. No hope of reconciliation could be entertained, so it was certain that both parties were constantly exposed to temptation and sin. He discreetly alluded to the fact that the husband had already succumbed to this danger, and praised the wife's lofty morality and piety, all the virtues which she displayed, and which guaranteed her veracity. Then, without formulating any conclusion of his own, he left the decision to the wisdom of the Congregation. And as he virtually repeated Advocate Morano's arguments, and Prada stubbornly refused to enter an appearance, it now seemed certain that the Congregation would by a great majority pronounce itself in favour of dissolution, a result which would enable the Holy Father to act benevolently.

"Ah! Dario mio!" said Benedetta, "we are at the end of our worries. But what a lot of money, what a lot of money it all costs! Aunt says that they will scarcely leave us water to drink."

So speaking she laughed with the happy heedlessness of an impassioned *amorosa*. It was not that the jurisdiction of the Congregations was in itself ruinous; indeed, in principle, it was gratuitous. Still there were a multitude of petty expenses, payments to subaltern employees, payments for medical consultations and certificates, copies of documents, and the

memoirs and addresses of counsel. And although the votes of the cardinals were certainly not bought direct, some of them ended by costing considerable sums, for it often became necessary to win over dependants, to induce quite a little world to bring influence to bear upon their Eminences; without mentioning that large pecuniary gifts, when made with tact, have a decisive effect in clearing away the greatest difficulties in that sphere of the Vatican. And, briefly, Monsignor Palma's nephew by marriage had cost the Boccaneras a large sum.

"But it doesn't matter, does it, Dario *mio*?" continued Benedetta. "Since you are now cured, they must make haste to give us permission to marry. That's all we ask of them. And if they want more, well, I'll give them my pearls, which will be all I shall have left me."

He also laughed, for money had never held any place in his life. He had never had it at his pleasure, and simply hoped that he would always live with his uncle the cardinal, who would certainly not leave him and his young wife in the streets. Ruined as the family was, one or two hundred thousand francs represented nothing to his mind, and he had heard that certain dissolutions of marriage had cost as much as half a million. So, by way of response, he could only find a jest: "Give them my ring as well," said he; "give them everything, my dear, and we shall still be happy in this old palace even if we have to sell the furniture!"

His words filled her with enthusiasm; she took his head between both hands and kissed him madly on

the eyes in an extraordinary transport of passion. Then, suddenly turning to Pierre, she said: "Oh! excuse me, Monsieur l'Abbé. I was forgetting that I have a commission for you. Yes, Monsignor Nani, who brought us that good news, bade me tell you that you are making people forget you too much, and that you ought to set to work to defend your book."

The priest listened in astonishment; then replied: "But it was he who advised me to disappear."

"No doubt — only it seems that the time has now come for you to see people and plead your cause. And Monsignor Nani has been able to learn that the reporter appointed to examine your book is Monsignor Fornaro, who lives on the Piazza Navona."

Pierre's stupefaction was increasing, for a reporter's name is never divulged, but kept quite secret, in order to ensure a free exercise of judgment. Was a new phase of his sojourn in Rome about to begin then? His mind was all wonderment. However, he simply answered: "Very good, I will set to work and see everybody."

X

IN his anxiety to bring things to a finish, Pierre wished to begin his campaign on the very next day. But on whom should he first call if he were to steer clear of blunders in that intricate and conceited ecclesiastical world? The question greatly perplexed him; however, on opening his door that morning he luckily perceived Don Vigilio in the passage, and with a sudden inspiration asked him to step inside. He realised that this thin little man with the saffron face, who always trembled with fever and displayed such exaggerated, timorous discretion, was in reality well informed, mixed up in everything. At one period it had seemed to Pierre that the secretary purposely avoided him, doubtless for fear of compromising himself; but recently Don Vigilio had proved less unsociable, as though he were not far from sharing the impatience which must be consuming the young Frenchman amidst his long enforced inactivity. And so, on this occasion, he did not seek to avoid the chat on which Pierre was bent.

"I must apologise," said the latter, "for asking you in here when things are in such disorder. But I have just received some more linen and some winter clothing from Paris. I came, you know, with just a little valise, meaning to stay for a fortnight, and yet

I've now been here for nearly three months, and am no more advanced than I was on the morning of my arrival."

Don Vigilio nodded. "Yes, yes, I know," said he.

Thereupon Pierre explained to him that Monsignor Nani had informed him, through the Contessina, that he now ought to act and see everybody for the defence of his book. But he was much embarrassed, as he did not know in what order to make his visits so that they might benefit him. For instance, ought he to call in the first place on Monsignor Fornaro, the *consultore* selected to report on his book, and whose name had been given him?

"Ah!" exclaimed Don Vigilio, quivering; "has Monsignor Nani gone as far as that—given you the reporter's name? That's even more than I expected." Then, forgetting his prudence, yielding to his secret interest in the affair, he resumed: "No, no; don't begin with Monsignor Fornaro. Your first visit should be a very humble one to the Prefect of the Congregation of the Index—his Eminence Cardinal Sanguinetti; for he would never forgive you for having offered your first homage to another should he some day hear of it." And, after a pause, Don Vigilio added, in a low voice, amidst a faint, feverish shiver: "And he *would* hear of it; everything becomes known."

Again he hesitated, and then, as if yielding to sudden, sympathetic courage, he took hold of the young Frenchman's hands. "I swear to you, my dear Monsieur Froment," he said, "that I should be very happy to help you, for you are a man of simple

soul, and I really begin to feel worried for you. But you must not ask me for impossibilities. Ah! if you only knew — if I could only tell you of all the perils which surround us! However, I think I can repeat to you that you must in no wise rely on my patron, his Eminence Cardinal Boccanera. He has expressed absolute disapproval of your book in my presence on several occasions. Only he is a saint, a most worthy, honourable man; and, though he won't defend you, he won't attack you — he will remain neutral out of regard for his niece, whom he loves so dearly, and who protects you. So, when you see him, don't plead your cause; it would be of no avail, and might even irritate him."

Pierre was not particularly distressed by this news, for at his first interview with the Cardinal, and on the few subsequent occasions when he had respectfully visited him, he had fully understood that his Eminence would never be other than an adversary. "Well," said he, "I will wait on him to thank him for his neutrality."

But at this all Don Vigilio's terrors returned. "No, no, don't do that; he would perhaps realise that I have spoken to you, and then what a disaster — my position would be compromised. I've said nothing, nothing! See the cardinals to begin with, see all the cardinals. Let it be understood between us that I've said nothing more." And, on that occasion at any rate, Don Vigilio would speak no further, but left the room shuddering and darting fiery, suspicious glances on either side of the corridor.

Pierre at once went out to call on Cardinal San-

guinetti. It was ten o'clock, and there was a chance that he might find him at home. This cardinal resided on the first floor of a little palazzo in a dark, narrow street near San Luigi dei Francesi.¹ There was here none of the giant ruin full of princely and melancholy grandeur amidst which Cardinal Bocconeri so stubbornly remained. The old regulation gala suite of rooms had been cut down just like the number of servants. There was no throne-room, no red hat hanging under a *baldacchino*, no arm-chair turned to the wall pending a visit from the Pope. A couple of apartments served as ante-rooms, and then came a *salon* where the Cardinal received; and there was no luxury, indeed scarcely any comfort; the furniture was of mahogany, dating from the empire period, and the hangings and carpets were dusty and faded by long use. Moreover, Pierre had to wait a long time for admittance, and when a servant, leisurely putting on his jacket, at last set the door ajar, it was only to say that his Eminence had been away at Frascati since the previous day.

Pierre then remembered that Cardinal Sanguinetti was one of the suburban bishops. At his see of Frascati he had a villa where he occasionally spent a few days whenever a desire for rest or some political motive impelled him to do so.

"And will his Eminence soon return?" Pierre inquired.

"Ah! we don't know. His Eminence is poorly, and expressly desired us to send nobody to worry him."

¹ This is the French church of Rome, and is under the protection of the French Government. — *Trans.*

When Pierre reached the street again he felt quite bewildered by this disappointment. At first he wondered whether he had not better call on Monsignor Fornaro without more ado, but he recollected Don Vigilio's advice to see the cardinals first of all, and, an inspiration coming to him, he resolved that his next visit should be for Cardinal Sarno, whose acquaintance he had eventually made at Donna Serafina's Mondays. In spite of Cardinal Sarno's voluntary self-effacement, people looked upon him as one of the most powerful and redoubtable members of the Sacred College, albeit his nephew Narcisse Habert declared that he knew no man who showed more obtuseness in matters which did not pertain to his habitual occupations. At all events, Pierre thought that the Cardinal, although not a member of the Congregation of the Index, might well give him some good advice, and possibly bring his great influence to bear on his colleagues.

The young man straightway betook himself to the Palace of the Propaganda, where he knew he would find the Cardinal. This palace, which is seen from the Piazza di Spagna, is a bare, massive corner pile between two streets. And Pierre, hampered by his faulty Italian, quite lost himself in it, climbing to floors whence he had to descend again, and finding himself in a perfect labyrinth of stairs, passages, and halls. At last he luckily came across the Cardinal's secretary, an amiable young priest, whom he had already seen at the Boccanera mansion. "Why, yes," said the secretary, "I think that his Eminence will receive you. You did well to come at this hour,

for he is always here of a morning. Kindly follow me, if you please."

Then came a fresh journey. Cardinal Sarno, long a Secretary of the Propaganda, now presided over the commission which controlled the organisation of worship in those countries of Europe, Africa, America, and Oceanica where Catholicism had lately gained a footing; and he thus had a private room of his own with special officers and assistants, reigning there with the ultra-methodical habits of a functionary who had grown old in his arm-chair, closely surrounded by nests of drawers, and knowing nothing of the world save the usual sights of the street below his window.

The secretary left Pierre on a bench at the end of a dark passage, which was lighted by gas even in full daylight. And quite a quarter of an hour went by before he returned with his eager, affable air. "His Eminence is conferring with some missionaries who are about to leave Rome," he said; "but it will soon be over, and he told me to take you to his room, where you can wait for him."

As soon as Pierre was alone in the Cardinal's sanctum he examined it with curiosity. Fairly spacious, but in no wise luxurious, it had green paper on its walls, and its furniture was of black wood and green damask. From two windows overlooking a narrow side street a mournful light reached the dark wall-paper and faded carpets. There were a couple of pier tables and a plain black writing-table, which stood near one window, its worn mole-skin covering littered with all sorts of papers. Pierre

drew near to it for a moment, and glanced at the arm-chair with damaged, sunken seat, the screen which sheltered it from draughts, and the old inkstand splotched with ink. And then, in the lifeless and oppressive atmosphere, the disquieting silence, which only the low rumbles from the street disturbed, he began to grow impatient.

However, whilst he was softly walking up and down he suddenly espied a map affixed to one wall, and the sight of it filled him with such absorbing thoughts that he soon forgot everything else. It was a coloured map of the world, the different tints indicating whether the territories belonged to victorious Catholicism or whether Catholicism was still warring there against unbelief; these last countries being classified as vicariates or prefectures, according to the general principles of organisation. And the whole was a graphic presentment of the long efforts of Catholicism in striving for the universal dominion which it has sought so unremittingly since its earliest hour. God has given the world to His Church, but it is needful that she should secure possession of it since error so stubbornly abides. From this has sprung the eternal battle, the fight which is carried on, even in our days, to win nations over from other religions, as it was in the days when the Apostles quitted Judæa to spread abroad the tidings of the Gospel. During the middle ages the great task was to organise conquered Europe, and this was too absorbing an enterprise to allow of any attempt at reconciliation with the dissident churches of the East. Then the Reformation burst forth, schism

was added to schism, and the Protestant half of Europe had to be reconquered as well as all the orthodox East.

War-like ardour, however, awoke at the discovery of the New World. Rome was ambitious of securing that other side of the earth, and missions were organised for the subjection of races of which nobody had known anything the day before, but which God had, nevertheless, given to His Church, like all the others. And by degrees the two great divisions of Christianity were formed, on one hand the Catholic nations, those where the faith simply had to be kept up, and which the Secretariate of State installed at the Vatican guided with sovereign authority, and on the other the schismatical or pagan nations which were to be brought back to the fold or converted, and over which the Congregation of the Propaganda sought to reign. Then this Congregation had been obliged to divide itself into two branches in order to facilitate its work — the Oriental branch, which dealt with the dissident sects of the East, and the Latin branch, whose authority extended over all the other lands of mission: the two forming a vast organisation — a huge, strong, closely meshed net cast over the whole world in order that not a single soul might escape.

It was in presence of that map that Pierre for the first time became clearly conscious of the mechanism which for centuries had been working to bring about the absorption of humanity. The Propaganda, richly dowered by the popes, and disposing of a considerable revenue, appeared to him like a separate force, a papacy within the papacy, and he well understood

that the Prefect of the Congregation should be called the "Red Pope," for how limitless were the powers of that man of conquest and domination, whose hands stretched from one to the other end of the earth. Allowing that the Cardinal Secretary held Europe, that diminutive portion of the globe, did not he, the Prefect, hold all the rest—the infinity of space, the distant countries as yet almost unknown? Besides, statistics showed that Rome's uncontested dominion was limited to 200 millions of Apostolic and Roman Catholics; whereas the schismatics of the East and the Reformation, if added together, already exceeded that number, and how small became the minority of the true believers when, besides the schismatics, one brought into line the 1000 millions of infidels who yet remained to be converted. The figures struck Pierre with a force which made him shudder. What! there were 5 million Jews, nearly 200 million Mahomedans, more than 700 million Brahmanists and Buddhists, without counting another 100 million pagans of divers creeds, the whole making 1000 millions, and against these the Christians could marshal barely more than 400 millions, who were divided among themselves, ever in conflict, one half with Rome and the other half against her?¹ Was it

¹ Some readers may question certain of the figures given by M. Zola, but it must be remembered that all such calculations (even those of the best "authorities") are largely guesswork. I myself think that there are more than 5 million Jews, and more than 200 millions of Mahomedans, but I regard the alleged number of Brahmanists and Buddhists as exaggerated. On the other hand, some statistical tables specify 80 millions of Confucianists, of whom M. Zola makes no separate mention. However, as regards

possible that in 1800 years Christianity had not proved victorious over even one-third of mankind, and that Rome, the eternal and all-powerful, only counted a sixth part of the nations among her subjects? Only one soul saved out of every six — how fearful was the disproportion! However, the map spoke with brutal eloquence: the red-tinted empire of Rome was but a speck when compared with the yellow-hued empire of the other gods — the endless countries which the Propaganda still had to conquer. And the question arose: How many centuries must elapse before the promises of the Christ were realised, before the whole world were gained to Christianity, before religious society spread over secular society, and there remained but one kingdom and one belief? And in presence of this question, in presence of the prodigious labour yet to be accomplished, how great was one's astonishment when one thought of Rome's tranquil serenity, her patient stubbornness, which has never known doubt or weariness, her bishops and ministers toiling without cessation in the conviction that she alone will some day be the mistress of the world!

Narcisse had told Pierre how carefully the embassies at Rome watched the doings of the Propaganda, for the missions were often the instruments of one or another nation, and exercised decisive influence in far-away lands. And so there was a continual struggle, in which the Congregation did all it could to favour the missionaries of Italy and her allies. It the number of Christians in the world, the figures given above are, within a few millions, probably accurate. — *Trans.*

had always been jealous of its French rival, "L'Œuvre de la Propagation de la Foi," installed at Lyons, which is as wealthy in money as itself, and richer in men of energy and courage. However, not content with levelling tribute on this French association, the Propaganda thwarted it, sacrificed it on every occasion when it had reason to think it might achieve a victory. Not once or twice, but over and over again had the French missionaries, the French orders, been driven from the scenes of their labours to make way for Italians or Germans. And Pierre, standing in that mournful, dusty room, which the sunlight never brightened, pictured the secret hot-bed of political intrigue masked by the civilising ardour of faith. Again he shuddered as one shudders when monstrous, terrifying things are brought home to one. And might not the most sensible be overcome? Might not the bravest be dismayed by the thought of that universal engine of conquest and domination, which worked with the stubbornness of eternity, not merely content with the gain of souls, but ever seeking to ensure its future sovereignty over the whole of corporeal humanity, and — pending the time when it might rule the nations itself — disposing of them, handing them over to the charge of this or that temporary master, in accordance with its good pleasure. And then, too, what a prodigious dream! Rome smiling and tranquilly awaiting the day when she will have united Christians, Mahomedans, Brahmanists, and Buddhists into one sole nation, of whom she will be both the spiritual and the temporal queen!

However, a sound of coughing made Pierre turn,

and he started on perceiving Cardinal Sarno, whom he had not heard enter. Standing in front of that map, he felt like one caught in the act of prying into a secret, and a deep flush overspread his face. The Cardinal, however, after looking at him fixedly with his dim eyes, went to his writing-table, and let himself drop into the arm-chair without saying a word. With a gesture he dispensed Pierre of the duty of kissing his ring.

"I desired to offer my homage to your Eminence," said the young man. "Is your Eminence unwell?"

"No, no, it's nothing but a dreadful cold which I can't get rid of. And then, too, I have so many things to attend to just now."

Pierre looked at the Cardinal as he appeared in the livid light from the window, puny, lopsided, with the left shoulder higher than the right, and not a sign of life on his worn and ashen countenance. The young priest was reminded of one of his uncles, who, after thirty years spent in the offices of a French public department, displayed the same lifeless glance, parchment-like skin, and weary hebetation. Was it possible that this withered old man, so lost in his black cassock with red edging, was really one of the masters of the world, with the map of Christendom so deeply stamped on his mind, albeit he had never left Rome, that the Prefect of the Propaganda did not take a decision without asking his opinion?

"Sit down, Monsieur l'Abbé," said the Cardinal. "So you have come to see me—you have something to ask of me!" And, whilst disposing himself to listen, he stretched out his thin bony hands to finger

the documents heaped up before him, glancing at each of them like some general, some strategist, profoundly versed in the science of his profession, who, although his army is far away, nevertheless directs it to victory from his private room, never for a moment allowing it to escape his mind.

Pierre was somewhat embarrassed by such a plain enunciation of the interested object of his visit; still, he decided to go to the point. "Yes, indeed," he answered, "it is a liberty I have taken to come and appeal to your Eminence's wisdom for advice. Your Eminence is aware that I am in Rome for the purpose of defending a book of mine, and I should be grateful if your Eminence would help and guide me." Then he gave a brief account of the present position of the affair, and began to plead his cause; but as he continued speaking he noticed that the Cardinal gave him very little attention, as though indeed he were thinking of something else, and failed to understand.

"Ah! yes," the great man at last muttered, "you have written a book. There was some question of it at Donna Serafina's one evening. But a priest ought not to write; it is a mistake for him to do so. What is the good of it? And the Congregation of the Index must certainly be in the right if it is prosecuting your book. At all events, what can I do? I don't belong to the Congregation, and I know nothing, nothing about the matter."

Pierre, pained at finding him so listless and indifferent, went on trying to enlighten and move him. But he realised that this man's mind, so far-reaching and penetrating in the field in which it had worked for

forty years, closed up as soon as one sought to divert it from its specialty. It was neither an inquisitive nor a supple mind. All trace of life faded from the Cardinal's eyes, and his entire countenance assumed an expression of mournful imbecility. "I know nothing, nothing," he repeated, "and I never recommend anybody." However, at last he made an effort: "But Nani is mixed up in this," said he. "What does Nani advise you to do?"

"Monsignor Nani has been kind enough to reveal to me that the reporter is Monsignor Fornaro, and advises me to see him."

At this Cardinal Sarno seemed surprised and somewhat roused. A little light returned to his eyes. "Ah! really," he rejoined, "ah! really — Well, if Nani has done that he must have some idea. Go and see Monsignor Fornaro." Then, after rising and dismissing his visitor, who was compelled to thank him, bowing deeply, he resumed his seat, and a moment later the only sound in the lifeless room was that of his bony fingers turning over the documents before him.

Pierre, in all docility, followed the advice given him, and immediately betook himself to the Piazza Navona, where, however, he learnt from one of Monsignor Fornaro's servants that the prelate had just gone out, and that to find him at home it was necessary to call in the morning at ten o'clock. Accordingly it was only on the following day that Pierre was able to obtain an interview. He had previously made inquiries and knew what was necessary concerning Monsignor Fornaro. Born at Naples, he had there

begun his studies under the Barnabites, had finished them at the Seminario Romano, and had subsequently, for many years, been a professor at the Università Gregoriana. Nowadays Consultor to several Congregations and a Canon of Santa Maria Maggiore, he placed his immediate ambition in a Canonry at St. Peter's, and harboured the dream of some day becoming Secretary of the Consistorial Congregation, a post conducting to the cardinalate. A theologian of remarkable ability, Monsignor Fornaro incurred no other reproach than that of occasionally sacrificing to literature by contributing articles, which he carefully abstained from signing, to certain religious reviews. He was also said to be very worldly.

Pierre was received as soon as he had sent in his card, and perhaps he would have fancied that his visit was expected had not an appearance of sincere surprise, blended with a little anxiety, marked his reception.

"Monsieur l'Abbé Froment, Monsieur l'Abbé Froment," repeated the prelate, looking at the card which he still held. "Kindly step in—I was about to forbid my door, for I have some urgent work to attend to. But no matter, sit down."

Pierre, however, remained standing, quite charmed by the blooming appearance of this tall, strong, handsome man who, although five and forty years of age, was quite fresh and rosy, with moist lips, caressing eyes, and scarcely a grey hair among his curly locks. Nobody more fascinating and decorative could be found among the whole Roman prelacy. Careful of his person undoubtedly, and aiming at a simple elegance, he looked really superb in his black cassock with

violet collar. And around him the spacious room where he received his visitors, gaily lighted as it was by two large windows facing the Piazza Navona, and furnished with a taste nowadays seldom met with among the Roman clergy, diffused a pleasant odour and formed a setting instinct with kindly cheerfulness.

"Pray sit down, Monsieur l'Abbé Froment," he resumed, "and tell me to what I am indebted for the honour of your visit."

He had already recovered his self-possession and assumed a *naïf*, purely obliging air; and Pierre, though the question was only natural, and he ought to have foreseen it, suddenly felt greatly embarrassed, more embarrassed indeed than in Cardinal Sarno's presence. Should he go to the point at once, confess the delicate motive of his visit? A moment's reflection showed him that this would be the best and worthier course. "Dear me, Monseigneur," he replied, "I know very well that the step I have taken in calling on you is not usually taken, but it has been advised me, and it has seemed to me that among honest folks there can never be any harm in seeking in all good faith to elucidate the truth."

"What is it, what is it, then?" asked the prelate with an expression of perfect candour, and still continuing to smile.

"Well, simply this. I have learnt that the Congregation of the Index has handed you my book 'New Rome,' and appointed you to examine it; and I have ventured to present myself before you in case you should have any explanations to ask of me."

But Monsignor Fornaro seemed unwilling to hear any more. He had carried both hands to his head and drawn back, albeit still courteous. "No, no," said he, "don't tell me that, don't continue, you would grieve me dreadfully. Let us say, if you like, that you have been deceived, for nothing ought to be known, in fact nothing is known, either by others or myself. I pray you, do not let us talk of such matters."

Pierre, however, had fortunately remarked what a decisive effect was produced when he had occasion to mention the name of the Assessor of the Holy Office. So it occurred to him to reply: "I most certainly do not desire to give you the slightest cause for embarrassment, Monseigneur, and I repeat to you that I would never have ventured to importune you if Monsignor Nani himself had not acquainted me with your name and address."

This time the effect was immediate, though Monsignor Fornaro, with that easy grace which he introduced into all things, made some ceremony about surrendering. He began by a demurrer, speaking archly with subtle shades of expression. "What! is Monsignor Nani the tattler! But I shall scold him, I shall get angry with him! And what does he know? He doesn't belong to the Congregation; he may have been led into error. You must tell him that he has made a mistake, and that I have nothing at all to do with your affair. That will teach him not to reveal needful secrets which everybody respects!" Then, in a pleasant way, with winning glance and flowery lips, he went on: "Come, since Monsignor Nani desires it,

I am willing to chat with you for a moment, my dear Monsieur Froment, but on condition that you shall know nothing of my report or of what may have been said or done at the Congregation."

Pierre in his turn smiled, admiring how easy things became when forms were respected and appearances saved. And once again he began to explain his case, the profound astonishment into which the prosecution of his book had thrown him, and his ignorance of the objections which were taken to it, and for which he had vainly sought a cause.

"Really, really," repeated the prelate, quite amazed at so much innocence. "The Congregation is a tribunal, and can only act when a case is brought before it. Proceedings have been taken against your book simply because it has been denounced."

"Yes, I know, denounced."

"Of course. Complaint was laid by three French bishops, whose names you will allow me to keep secret, and it consequently became necessary for the Congregation to examine the incriminated work."

Pierre looked at him quite scared. Denounced by three bishops? Why? With what object? Then he thought of his protector. "But Cardinal Bergerot," said he, "wrote me a letter of approval, which I placed at the beginning of my work as a preface. Ought not a guarantee like that to have been sufficient for the French episcopacy?"

Monsignor Fornaro wagged his head in a knowing way before making up his mind to reply: "Ah! yes, no doubt, his Eminence's letter, a very beautiful letter. I think, however, that it would have been much

better if he had not written it, both for himself and for you especially." Then as the priest, whose surprise was increasing, opened his mouth to urge him to explain himself, he went on: "No, no, I know nothing, I say nothing. His Eminence Cardinal Bergerot is a saintly man whom everybody venerates, and if it were possible for him to sin it would only be through pure goodness of heart."

Silence fell. Pierre could divine that an abyss was opening, and dared not insist. However, he at last resumed with some violence: "But, after all, why should my book be prosecuted, and the books of others be left untouched? I have no intention of acting as a denouncer myself, but how many books there are to which Rome closes her eyes, and which are far more dangerous than mine can be!"

This time Monsignor Fornaro seemed glad to be able to support Pierre's views. "You are right," said he, "we cannot deal with every bad book, and it greatly distresses us. But you must remember what an incalculable number of works we should be compelled to read. And so we have to content ourselves with condemning the worst *en bloc*."

Then he complacently entered into explanations. In principle, no printer ought to send any work to press without having previously submitted the manuscript to the approval of the bishop of the diocese. Nowadays, however, with the enormous output of the printing trade, one could understand how terribly embarrassed the bishops would be if the printers were suddenly to conform to the Church's regulation. There was neither the time nor the money,

nor were there the men necessary for such colossal labour. And so the Congregation of the Index condemned *en masse*, without examination, all works of certain categories: first, books which were dangerous for morals, all erotic writings, and all novels; next the various bibles in the vulgar tongue, for the perusal of Holy Writ without discretion was not allowable; then the books on magic and sorcery, and all works on science, history, or philosophy that were in any way contrary to dogma, as well as the writings of heresiarchs or mere ecclesiastics discussing religion, which should never be discussed. All these were wise laws made by different popes, and were set forth in the preface to the catalogue of forbidden books which the Congregation published, and without them this catalogue, to have been complete, would in itself have formed a large library. On turning it over one found that the works singled out for interdiction were chiefly those of priests, the task being so vast and difficult that Rome's concern extended but little beyond the observance of good order within the Church. And Pierre and his book came within the limit.

"You will understand," continued Monsignor Fornaro, "that we have no desire to advertise a heap of unwholesome writings by honouring them with special condemnation. Their name is legion in every country, and we should have neither enough paper nor enough ink to deal with them all. So we content ourselves with condemning one from time to time, when it bears a famous name and makes too much noise, or contains disquieting attacks on the faith.

This suffices to remind the world that we exist and defend ourselves without abandoning aught of our rights or duties."

"But my book, my book," exclaimed Pierre, "why these proceedings against my book?"

"I am explaining that to you as far as it is allowable for me to do, my dear Monsieur Froment. You are a priest, your book is a success, you have published a cheap edition of it which sells very readily; and I don't speak of its literary merit, which is remarkable, for it contains a breath of real poetry which transported me, and on which I must really compliment you. However, under the circumstances which I have enumerated, how could we close our eyes to such a work as yours, in which the conclusion arrived at is the annihilation of our holy religion and the destruction of Rome?"

Pierre remained open-mouthed, suffocating with surprise. "The destruction of Rome!" he at last exclaimed; "but I desire to see Rome rejuvenated, eternal, again the queen of the world." And, once more mastered by his glowing enthusiasm, he defended himself and confessed his faith: Catholicism reverting to the principles and practices of the primitive Church, drawing the blood of regeneration from the fraternal Christianity of Jesus; the Pope, freed from all terrestrial royalty, governing the whole of humanity with charity and love, and saving the world from the frightful social cataclysm that threatens it by leading it to the real Kingdom of God: the Christian communion of all nations united in one nation only. "And can the Holy Father disavow me?" he contin-

ued. "Are not these his secret ideas, which people are beginning to divine, and does not my only offence lie in having expressed them perhaps too soon and too freely? And if I were allowed to see him should I not at once obtain from him an order to stop these proceedings?"

Monsignor Fornaro no longer spoke, but wagged his head without appearing offended by the priest's juvenile ardour. On the contrary, he smiled with increasing amiability, as though highly amused by so much innocence and imagination. At last he gaily responded, "Oh! speak on, speak on; it isn't I who will stop you. I'm forbidden to say anything. But the temporal power, the temporal power."

"Well, what of the temporal power?" asked Pierre.

The prelate had again become silent, raising his amiable face to heaven and waving his white hands with a pretty gesture. And when he once more opened his mouth it was to say: "Then there's your new religion—for the expression occurs twice: the new religion, the new religion—ah, *Dio!*"

Again he became restless, going off into an ecstasy of wonderment, at sight of which Pierre impatiently exclaimed: "I do not know what your report will be, Monseigneur, but I declare to you that I have had no desire to attack dogma. And, candidly now, my whole book shows that I only sought to write a work of pity and salvation. It is only justice that some account should be taken of one's intentions."

Monsignor Fornaro had become very calm and paternal again. "Oh! intentions! intentions!" he said as he rose to dismiss his visitor. "You may be

sure, my dear Monsieur Froment, that I feel much honoured by your visit. Naturally I cannot tell you what my report will be; as it is, we have talked too much about it, and, in fact, I ought to have refused to listen to your defence. At the same time, you will always find me ready to be of service to you in anything that does not go against my duty. But I greatly fear that your book will be condemned." And then, as Pierre again started, he added: "Well, yes. It is facts that are judged, you know, not intentions. So all defence is useless; the book is there, and we take it such as it is. However much you may try to explain it, you cannot alter it. And this is why the Congregation never calls the accused parties before it, and never accepts from them aught but retraction pure and simple. And, indeed, the wisest course would be for you to withdraw your book and make your submission. No? You won't? Ah! how young you are, my friend!"

He laughed yet more loudly at the gesture of revolt, of indomitable pride which had just escaped his young friend, as he called him. Then, on reaching the door, he again threw off some of his reserve, and said in a low voice, "Come, my dear Abbé, there is something I will do for you. I will give you some good advice. At bottom, I myself am nothing. I deliver my report, and it is printed, and the members of the Congregation read it, but are quite free to pay no attention to it. However, the Secretary of the Congregation, Father Dangelis, can accomplish everything, even impossibilities. Go to see him; you will find him at the Dominican convent behind the Piazza

di Spagna. Don't name me. And for the present good-bye, my dear fellow, good-bye."

Pierre once more found himself on the Piazza Navona, quite dazed, no longer knowing what to believe or hope. A cowardly idea was coming over him; why should he continue this struggle, in which his adversaries remained unknown and indiscernible? Why carry obstinacy any further, why linger any longer in that impassionating but deceptive Rome? He would flee that very evening, return to Paris, disappear there, and forget his bitter disillusion in the practice of humble charity. He was traversing one of those hours of weakness when the long-dreamt-of task suddenly seems to be an impossibility. However, amidst his great confusion he was nevertheless walking on, going towards his destination. And when he found himself in the Corso, then in the Via dei Condotti, and finally in the Piazza di Spagna, he resolved that he would at any rate see Father Dangelis. The Dominican convent is there, just below the Trinità de' Monti.

Ah! those Dominicans! Pierre had never thought of them without a feeling of respect with which mingled a little fear. What vigorous pillars of the principle of authority and theocracy they had for centuries proved themselves to be! To them the Church had been indebted for its greatest measure of authority; they were the glorious soldiers of its triumph. Whilst St. Francis won the souls of the humble over to Rome, St. Dominic, on Rome's behalf, subjected all the superior souls — those of the intelligent and powerful. And this he did with passion, amidst a blaze of faith

and determination, making use of all possible means, preachings, writings, and police and judicial pressure. Though he did not found the Inquisition, its principles were his, and it was with fire and sword that his fraternal, loving heart waged war on schism. Living like his monks, in poverty, chastity, and obedience — the great virtues of those times of pride and licentiousness — he went from city to city, exhorting the impious, striving to bring them back to the Church and arraigning them before the ecclesiastical courts when his preachings did not suffice. He also laid siege to science, sought to make it his own, dreamt of defending God with the weapons of reason and human knowledge like a true forerunner of the angelic St. Thomas, that light of the middle ages, who joined the Dominican order and set everything in his "*Summa Theologiæ*," psychology, logic, policy, and morals. And thus it was that the Dominicans filled the world, upholding the doctrines of Rome in the most famous pulpits of every nation, and contending almost everywhere against the free spirit of the Universities, like the vigilant guardians of dogma that they were, the unwearying artisans of the fortunes of the popes, the most powerful amongst all the artistic, scientific, and literary workers who raised the huge edifice of Catholicism such as it exists to-day.

However, Pierre, who could feel that this edifice was even now tottering, though it had been built, people fancied, so substantially as to last through all eternity, asked himself what could be the present use of the Dominicans, those toilers of another age, whose police system and whose tribunals had perished be-

neath universal execration, whose voices were no longer listened to, whose books were but seldom read, and whose rôle as *savants* and civilisers had come to an end in presence of latter-day science, the truths of which were rending dogma on all sides. Certainly the Dominicans still form an influential and prosperous order ; but how far one is from the times when their general reigned in Rome, Master of the Holy Palace, with convents and schools, and subjects throughout Europe! Of all their vast inheritance, so far as the Roman curia is concerned, only a few posts now remain to them, and among others the Secretaryship of the Congregation of the Index, a former dependency of the Holy Office where they once despotically ruled.

Pierre was immediately ushered into the presence of Father Dangelis. The convent parlour was vast, bare, and white, flooded with bright sunshine. The only furniture was a table and some stools; and a large brass crucifix hung from the wall. Near the table stood the Father, a very thin man of about fifty, severely draped in his ample white habit and black mantle. From his long ascetic face, with thin lips, thin nose, and pointed, obstinate chin, his grey eyes shone out with a fixity that embarrassed one. And, moreover, he showed himself very plain and simple of speech, and frigidly polite in manner.

"Monsieur l'Abbé Froment — the author of 'New Rome,' I suppose?" Then seating himself on one stool and pointing to another, he added: "Pray acquaint me with the object of your visit, Monsieur l'Abbé."

Thereupon Pierre had to begin his explanation, his defence, all over again; and the task soon became the more painful as his words fell from his lips amidst death-like silence and frigidity. Father Dangelis did not stir; with his hands crossed upon his knees he kept his sharp, penetrating eyes fixed upon those of the priest. And when the latter had at last ceased speaking, he slowly said: "I did not like to interrupt you, Monsieur l'Abbé, but it was not for me to hear all this. Process against your book has begun, and no power in the world can stay or impede its course. I do not therefore realise what it is that you apparently expect of me."

In a quivering voice Pierre was bold enough to answer: "I look for some kindness and justice."

A pale smile, instinct with proud humility, arose to the Dominican's lips. "Be without fear," he replied, "God has ever deigned to enlighten me in the discharge of my modest duties. Personally, be it said, I have no justice to render; I am but an employee whose duty is to classify matters and draw up documents concerning them. Their Eminences, the members of the Congregation, will alone pronounce judgment on your book. And assuredly they will do so with the help of the Holy Spirit. You will only have to bow to their sentence when it shall have been ratified by his Holiness."

Then he broke off the interview by rising, and Pierre was obliged to do the same. The Dominican's words were virtually identical with those that had fallen from Monsignor Fornaro, but they were spoken with cutting frankness, a sort of tranquil bravery.

On all sides Pierre came into collision with the same anonymous force, the same powerful engine whose component parts sought to ignore one another. For a long time yet, no doubt, he would be sent from one to the other, without ever finding the volitional element which reasoned and acted. And the only thing that he could do was to bow to it all.

However, before going off, it occurred to him once more to mention the name of Monsignor Nani, the powerful effect of which he had begun to realise. "I ask your pardon," he said, "for having disturbed you to no purpose, but I simply deferred to the kind advice of Monsignor Nani, who has condescended to show me some interest."

The effect of these words was unexpected. Again did Father Dangelis's thin face brighten into a smile, but with a twist of the lips, sharp with ironical contempt. He had become yet paler, and his keen intelligent eyes were flaming. "Ah! it was Monsignor Nani who sent you!" he said. "Well, if you think you need a protector, it is useless for you to apply to any other than himself. He is all-powerful. Go to see him; go to see him!"

And that was the only encouragement Pierre derived from his visit: the advice to go back to the man who had sent him. At this he felt that he was losing ground, and he resolved to return home in order to reflect on things and try to understand them before taking any further steps. The idea of questioning Don Vigilio at once occurred to him, and that same evening after supper he luckily met the secretary in the corridor, just as, candle in hand, he was on his way to bed.

"I have so many things that I should like to say to you," Pierre said to him. "Can you kindly come to my rooms for a moment?"

But the other promptly silenced him with a gesture, and then whispered: "Didn't you see Abbé Paparelli on the first floor? He was following us, I'm sure."

Pierre often saw the train-bearer roaming about the house, and greatly disliked his stealthy, prying ways. However, he had hitherto attached no importance to him, and was therefore much surprised by Don Vigilio's question. The other, without awaiting his reply, had returned to the end of the corridor, where for a long while he remained listening. Then he came back on tip-toe, blew out his candle, and darted into Pierre's sitting-room. "There — that's done," he murmured directly the door was shut. "But if it is all the same to you, we won't stop in this sitting-room. Let us go into your bed-room. Two walls are better than one."

When the lamp had been placed on the table and they found themselves seated face to face in that bare, faded bed-chamber, Pierre noticed that the secretary was suffering from a more violent attack of fever than usual. His thin puny figure was shivering from head to foot, and his ardent eyes had never before blazed so blackly in his ravaged, yellow face. "Are you poorly?" asked Pierre. "I don't want to tire you."

"Poorly, yes, I am on fire — but I want to talk. I can't bear it any longer. One always has to relieve oneself some day or other."

Was it his complaint that he desired to relieve; or

was he anxious to break his long silence in order that it might not stifle him? This at first remained uncertain. He immediately asked for an account of the steps that Pierre had lately taken, and became yet more restless when he heard how the other had been received by Cardinal Sarno, Monsignor Fornaro, and Father Dangelis. "Yes, that's quite it," he repeated, "nothing astonishes me nowadays, and yet I feel indignant on your account. Yes, it doesn't concern me, but all the same it makes me ill, for it reminds me of all my own troubles. You must not rely on Cardinal Sarno, remember, for he is always elsewhere, with his mind far away, and has never helped anybody. But that Fornaro, that Fornaro!"

"He seemed to me very amiable, even kindly disposed," replied Pierre; "and I really think that after our interview, he will considerably soften his report."

"He! Why, the gentler he was with you the more grievously he will saddle you! He will devour you, fatten himself with such easy prey. Ah! you don't know him, *dilizioso* that he is, ever on the watch to rear his own fortune on the troubles of poor devils whose defeat is bound to please the powerful. I prefer the other one, Father Dangelis, a terrible man, no doubt, but frank and brave and of superior mind. I must admit, however, that he would burn you like a handful of straw if he were the master. And ah! if I could tell you everything, if I could show you the frightful under-side of this world of ours, the monstrous, ravenous ambition, the abominable network of intrigues, venality, cowardice, treachery, and even crime!"

On seeing Don Vigilio so excited, in such a blaze of spite, Pierre thought of extracting from him some of the many items of information which he had hitherto sought in vain. "Well, tell me merely what is the position of my affair," he responded. "When I questioned you on my arrival here you said that nothing had yet reached Cardinal Boccanera. But all information must now have been collected, and you must know of it. And, by the way, Monsignor Fornaro told me that three French bishops had asked that my book should be prosecuted. Three bishops, is it possible?"

Don Vigilio shrugged his shoulders. "Ah!" said he, "yours is an innocent soul! I'm surprised that there were *only* three! Yes, several documents relating to your affair are in our hands; and, moreover, things have turned out much as I suspected. The three bishops are first the Bishop of Tarbes, who evidently carries out the vengeance of the Fathers of Lourdes; and then the Bishops of Poitiers and Evreux, who are both known as uncompromising Ultramontanists and passionate adversaries of Cardinal Bergerot. The Cardinal, you know, is regarded with disfavour at the Vatican, where his Gallican ideas and broad liberal mind provoke perfect anger. And don't seek for anything else. The whole affair lies in that: an execution which the powerful Fathers of Lourdes demand of his Holiness, and a desire to reach and strike Cardinal Bergerot through your book, by means of the letter of approval which he imprudently wrote to you and which you published by way of preface. For a long time past the condemnations of the Index

have largely been secret knock-down blows levelled at Churchmen. Denunciation reigns supreme, and the law applied is that of good pleasure. I could tell you some almost incredible things, how perfectly innocent books have been selected among a hundred for the sole object of killing an idea or a man; for the blow is almost always levelled at some one behind the author, some one higher than he is. And there is such a hot-bed of intrigue, such a source of abuses in this institution of the Index, that it is tottering, and even among those who surround the Pope it is felt that it must soon be freshly regulated if it is not to fall into complete discredit. I well understand that the Church should endeavour to retain universal power, and govern by every fit weapon, but the weapons must be such as one can use without their injustice leading to revolt, or their antique childishness provoking merriment!"

Pierre listened with dolorous astonishment in his heart. Since he had been at Rome and had seen the Fathers of the Grotto saluted and feared there, holding an authoritative position, thanks to the large alms which they contributed to the Peter's Pence, he had felt that they were behind the proceedings instituted against him, and realised that he would have to pay for a certain page of his book in which he had called attention to an iniquitous displacement of fortune at Lourdes, a frightful spectacle which made one doubt the very existence of the Divinity, a continual cause of battle and conflict which would disappear in the truly Christian society of to-morrow. And he could also now understand that his delight at the loss of

the temporal power must have caused a scandal, and especially that the unfortunate expression "a new religion" had alone been sufficient to arm *delatores* against him. But that which amazed and grieved him was to learn that Cardinal Bergerot's letter was looked upon as a crime, and that his (Pierre's) book was denounced and condemned in order that adversaries who dared not attack the venerable pastor face to face might deal him a cowardly blow from behind. The thought of afflicting that saintly man, of serving as the implement to strike him in his ardent charity, cruelly grieved Pierre. And how bitter and disheartening it was to find the most hideous questions of pride and money, ambition and appetite, running riot with the most ferocious egotism, beneath the quarrels of those leaders of the Church who ought only to have contended together in love for the poor!

And then Pierre's mind revolted against that supremely odious and idiotic Index. He now understood how it worked, from the arrival of the denunciations to the public posting of the titles of the condemned works. He had just seen the Secretary of the Congregation, Father Dangelis, to whom the denunciations came, and who then investigated the affair, collecting all documents and information concerning it with the passion of a cultivated authoritarian monk, who dreamt of ruling minds and consciences as in the heroic days of the Inquisition. Then, too, Pierre had visited one of the consultive prelates, Monsignor Fornaro, who was so ambitious and affable, and so subtle a theologian that he would have discovered attacks against the faith in a treatise

on algebra, had his interests required it. Next there were the infrequent meetings of the cardinals, who at long intervals voted for the interdiction of some hostile book, deeply regretting that they could not suppress them all; and finally came the Pope, approving and signing the decrees, which was a mere formality, for were not all books guilty? But what an extraordinary wretched Bastille of the past was that aged Index, that senile institution now sunk into second childhood. One realised that it must have been a formidable power when books were rare and the Church had tribunals of blood and fire to enforce her edicts. But books had so greatly multiplied, the written, printed thoughts of mankind had swollen into such a deep broad river, that they had swept all opposition away, and now the Index was swamped and reduced to powerlessness, compelled more and more to limit its field of action, to confine itself to the examination of the writings of ecclesiastics, and even in this respect it was becoming corrupt, fouled by the worst passions and changed into an instrument of intrigue, hatred, and vengeance. Ah! that confession of decay, of paralysis which grew more and more complete amidst the scornful indifference of the nations. To think that Catholicism, the once glorious agent of civilisation, had come to such a pass that it cast books into hell-fire by the heap; and what books they were, almost the entire literature, history, philosophy, and science of the past and the present! Few works, indeed, are published nowadays that would not fall under the ban of the Church. If she seems to close her eyes, it is in order to avoid the impossible

task of hunting out and destroying everything. Yet she stubbornly insists on retaining a semblance of sovereign authority over human intelligence, just as some very aged queen, dispossessed of her states and henceforth without judges or executioners, might continue to deliver vain sentences to which only an infinitesimal minority would pay heed. But imagine the Church momentarily victorious, miraculously mastering the modern world, and ask yourself what she, with her tribunals to condemn and her gendarmes to enforce, would do with human thought. Imagine a strict application of the Index regulations: no printer able to put anything whatever to press without the approval of his bishop, and even then every book laid before the Congregation, the past expunged, the present throttled, subjected to an intellectual Reign of Terror! Would not the closing of every library perforce ensue, would not the long heritage of written thought be cast into prison, would not the future be barred, would not all progress, all conquest of knowledge, be totally arrested? Rome herself is nowadays a terrible example of such a disastrous experiment — Rome with her congealed soil, her dead sap, killed by centuries of papal government, Rome which has become so barren that not a man, not a work has sprung from her midst even after five and twenty years of awakening and liberty! And who would accept such a state of things, not among people of revolutionary mind, but among those of religious mind that might possess any culture and breadth of view? Plainly enough it was all mere childishness and absurdity.

Deep silence reigned, and Pierre, quite upset by his reflections, made a gesture of despair whilst glancing at Don Vigilio, who sat speechless in front of him. For a moment longer, amidst the death-like quiescence of that old sleeping mansion, both continued silent, seated face to face in the closed chamber which the lamp illumined with a peaceful glow. But at last Don Vigilio leant forward, his eyes sparkling, and with a feverish shiver murmured: "It is they, you know, always they, at the bottom of everything."

Pierre, who did not understand, felt astonished, indeed somewhat anxious at such a strange remark coming without any apparent transition. "Who are *they*?" he asked.

"The Jesuits!"

In this reply the little, withered, yellow priest had set all the concentrated rage of his exploding passion. Ah! so much the worse if he had perpetrated a fresh act of folly. The cat was out of the bag at last! Nevertheless, he cast a final suspicious glance around the walls. And then he relieved his mind at length, with a flow of words which gushed forth the more irresistibly since he had so long held them in check. "Ah! the Jesuits, the Jesuits! You fancy that you know them, but you haven't even an idea of their abominable actions and incalculable power. They it is whom one always comes upon, everywhere, in every circumstance. Remember *that* whenever you fail to understand anything, if you wish to understand it. Whenever grief or trouble comes upon you, whenever you suffer, whenever you weep, say to yourself at once: 'It is they; they are there!' Why, for all I

know, there may be one of them under that bed, inside that cupboard. Ah! the Jesuits, the Jesuits! They have devoured me, they are devouring me still, they will leave nothing of me at last, neither flesh nor bone."

Then, in a halting voice, he related the story of his life, beginning with his youth, which had opened so hopefully. He belonged to the petty provincial nobility, and had been dowered with a fairly large income, besides a keen, supple intelligence, which looked smilingly towards the future. Nowadays, he would assuredly have been a prelate, on the road to high dignities, but he had been foolish enough to speak ill of the Jesuits and to thwart them in two or three circumstances. And from that moment, if he were to be believed, they had caused every imaginable misfortune to rain upon him: his father and mother had died, his banker had robbed him and fled, good positions had escaped him at the very moment when he was about to occupy them, the most awful misadventures had pursued him amidst the duties of his ministry to such a point indeed, that he had narrowly escaped interdiction. It was only since Cardinal Boccanera, compassionating his bad luck, had taken him into his house and attached him to his person, that he had enjoyed a little repose. "Here I have a refuge, an asylum," he continued. "They execrate his Eminence, who has never been on their side, but they haven't yet dared to attack him or his servants. Oh! I have no illusions, they will end by catching me again, all the same. Perhaps they will even hear of our conversation this evening, and make me pay

dearly for it; for I do wrong to speak, I speak in spite of myself. They have stolen all my happiness, and brought all possible misfortune on me, everything that was possible, everything — you hear me!”

Increasing discomfort was taking possession of Pierre, who, seeking to relieve himself by a jest, exclaimed: “Come, come, at any rate it wasn’t the Jesuits who gave you the fever.”

“Yes, yes, it was!” Don Vigilio violently declared. “I caught it on the bank of the Tiber one evening, when I went to weep there in my grief at having been driven from the little church where I officiated.”

Pierre, hitherto, had never believed in the terrible legend of the Jesuits. He belonged to a generation which laughed at the idea of wehr-wolves, and considered the *bourgeois* fear of the famous black men, who hid themselves in walls and terrorised families, to be a trifle ridiculous. To him all such things seemed to be nursery tales, exaggerated by religious and political passion. And so it was with amazement that he examined Don Vigilio, suddenly fearing that he might have to deal with a maniac.

Nevertheless he could not help recalling the extraordinary story of the Jesuits. If St. Francis of Assisi and St. Dominic are the very soul and spirit of the middle ages, its masters and teachers, the former a living expression of all the ardent, charitable faith of the humble, and the other defending dogma and fixing doctrines for the intelligent and the powerful, on the other hand Ignatius de Loyola appeared on the threshold of modern times to save the tottering heritage by accommodating religion to the new devel-

opments of society, thereby ensuring it the empire of the world which was about to appear.

At the advent of the modern era it seemed as if the Deity were to be vanquished in the uncompromising struggle with sin, for it was certain that the old determination to suppress Nature, to kill the man within man, with his appetites, passions, heart, and blood, could only result in a disastrous defeat, in which, indeed, the Church found herself on the very eve of sinking; and it was the Jesuits who came to extricate her from this peril and reinvigorate her by deciding that it was she who now ought to go to the world, since the world seemed unwilling to go any longer to her. All lay in that; you find the Jesuits declaring that one can enter into arrangements with heaven; they bend and adjust themselves to the customs, prejudices, and even vices of the times; they smile, all condescension, cast rigourism aside, and practice the diplomacy of amiability, ever ready to turn the most awful abominations "to the greater glory of God." That is their motto, their battle-cry, and thence springs the moral principle which many regard as their crime: that all means are good to attain one's end, especially when that end is the furtherance of the Deity's interests as represented by those of the Church. And what overwhelming success attends the efforts of the Jesuits! they swarm and before long cover the earth, on all sides becoming uncontested masters. They shrive kings, they acquire immense wealth, they display such victorious power of invasion that, however humbly they may set foot in any country, they soon wholly possess it: souls,

bodies, power, and fortune alike falling to them. And they are particularly zealous in founding schools, they show themselves to be incomparable moulders of the human brain, well understanding that power always belongs to the morrow, to the generations which are growing up and whose master one must be if one desire to reign eternally. So great is their power, based on the necessity of compromise with sin, that, on the morrow of the Council of Trent, they transform the very spirit of Catholicism, penetrate it, identify it with themselves and become the indispensable soldiers of the papacy which lives by them and for them. And from that moment Rome is theirs, Rome where their general so long commands, whence so long go forth the directions for the obscure tactics which are blindly followed by their innumerable army, whose skilful organisation covers the globe as with an iron network hidden by the velvet of hands expert in dealing gently with poor suffering humanity. But, after all, the most prodigious feature is the stupefying vitality of the Jesuits who are incessantly tracked, condemned, executed, and yet still and ever erect. As soon as their power asserts itself, their unpopularity begins and gradually becomes universal. Hoots of execration arise around them, abominable accusations, scandalous law cases in which they appear as corruptors and felons. Pascal devotes them to public contempt, parliaments condemn their books to be burnt, universities denounce their system of morals and their teaching as poisonous. They foment such disturbances, such struggles in every kingdom, that organised persecution sets in, and they are soon driven

from everywhere. During more than a century they become wanderers, expelled, then recalled, passing and repassing frontiers, leaving a country amidst cries of hatred to return to it as soon as quiet has been restored. Finally, for supreme disaster, they are suppressed by one pope, but another re-establishes them, and since then they have been virtually tolerated everywhere. And in the diplomatic self-effacement, the shade in which they have the prudence to sequester themselves, they are none the less triumphant, quietly confident of their victory like soldiers who have once and for ever subdued the earth.

Pierre was aware that, judging by mere appearances, the Jesuits were nowadays dispossessed of all influence in Rome. They no longer officiated at the Gesù, they no longer directed the Collegio Romano, where they formerly fashioned so many souls; and with no abode of their own, reduced to accept foreign hospitality, they had modestly sought a refuge at the Collegio Germanico, where there is a little chapel. There they taught and there they still confessed, but without the slightest bustle or display. Was one to believe, however, that this effacement was but masterly cunning, a feigned disappearance in order that they might really remain secret, all-powerful masters, the hidden hand which directs and guides everything? People certainly said that the proclamation of papal Infallibility had been their work, a weapon with which they had armed themselves whilst feigning to bestow it on the papacy, in readiness for the coming decisive task which their genius foresaw in the approaching social upheavals. And thus there might perhaps be

some truth in what Don Vigilio, with a shiver of mystery, related about their occult sovereignty, a seizin, as it were, of the government of the Church, a royalty ignored but nevertheless complete.

As this idea occurred to Pierre, a dim connection between certain of his experiences arose in his mind and he all at once inquired: "Is Monsignor Nani a Jesuit, then?"

These words seemed to revive all Don Vigilio's anxious passion. He waved his trembling hand, and replied: "He? Oh, he's too clever, too skilful by far to have taken the robe. But he comes from that Collegio Romano where his generation grew up, and he there imbibed that Jesuit genius which adapted itself so well to his own. Whilst fully realising the danger of wearing an unpopular and embarrassing livery, and wishing to be free, he is none the less a Jesuit in his flesh, in his bones, in his very soul. He is evidently convinced that the Church can only triumph by utilising the passions of mankind, and withal he is very fond of the Church, very pious at bottom, a very good priest, serving God without weakness in gratitude for the absolute power which God gives to His ministers. And besides, he is so charming, incapable of any brutal action, full of the good breeding of his noble Venetian ancestors, and deeply versed in knowledge of the world, thanks to his experiences at the nunciatures of Paris, Vienna, and other places, without mentioning that he knows everything that goes on by reason of the delicate functions which he has discharged for ten years past as Assessor of the Holy Office. Yes, he is powerful,

all-powerful, and in him you do not have the furtive Jesuit whose robe glides past amidst suspicion, but the head, the brain, the leader whom no uniform designates."

This reply made Pierre grave, for he was quite willing to admit that an opportunist code of morals, like that of the Jesuits, was inoculable and now predominated throughout the Church. Indeed, the Jesuits might disappear, but their doctrine would survive them, since it was the one weapon of combat, the one system of strategy which might again place the nations under the dominion of Rome. And in reality the struggle which continued lay precisely in the attempts to accommodate religion to the century, and the century to religion. Such being the case, Pierre realised that such men as Monsignor Nani might acquire vast and even decisive importance.

"Ah! if you knew, if you knew," continued Don Vigilio, "he's everywhere, he has his hand in everything. For instance, nothing has ever happened here, among the Boccaneras, but I've found him at the bottom of it, tangling or untangling the threads according to necessities with which he alone is acquainted."

Then, in the unquenchable fever for confiding things which was now consuming him, the secretary related how Monsignor Nani had most certainly brought on Benedetta's divorce case. The Jesuits, in spite of their conciliatory spirit, have always taken up a hostile position with regard to Italy, either because they do not despair of reconquering Rome, or because they wait to treat in due season with the ultimate and real

victor, whether King or Pope. And so Nani, who had long been one of Donna Serafina's intimates, had helped to precipitate the rupture with Prada as soon as Benedetta's mother was dead. Again, it was he who, to prevent any interference on the part of the patriotic Abbé Pisoni, the young woman's confessor and the artisan of her marriage, had urged her to take the same spiritual director as her aunt, Father Lorenza, a handsome Jesuit with clear and kindly eyes, whose confessional in the chapel of the Collegio Germanico was incessantly besieged by penitents. And it seemed certain that this manoeuvre had brought about everything; what one cleric working for Italy had done, was to be undone by another working against Italy. Why was it, however, that Nani, after bringing about the rupture, had momentarily ceased to show all interest in the affair to the point even of jeopardising the suit for the dissolution of the marriage? And why was he now again busy-ing himself with it, setting Donna Serafina in action, prompting her to buy Monsignor Palma's support, and bringing his own influence to bear on the cardinals of the Congregation? There was mystery in all this, as there was in everything he did, for his schemes were always complicated and distant in their effects. However, one might suppose that he now wished to hasten the marriage of Benedetta and Dario, in order to stop all the abominable rumours which were circulating in the white world; unless, indeed, this divorce secured by pecuniary payments and the pressure of notorious influences were an intentional scandal at first spun out and now hastened, in order to harm

Cardinal Boccanera, whom the Jesuits might desire to brush aside in certain eventualities which were possibly near at hand.

"To tell the truth, I rather incline to the latter view," said Don Vigilio, "the more so indeed as I learnt this evening that the Pope is not well. With an old man of eighty-four the end may come at any moment, and so the Pope can never catch cold but what the Sacred College and the prelaties are all agog, stirred by sudden ambitious rivalries. Now, the Jesuits have always opposed Cardinal Boccanera's candidature. They ought to be on his side, on account of his rank, and his uncompromising attitude towards Italy, but the idea of giving themselves such a master disquiets them, for they consider him unseasonably rough and stern, too violent in his faith, which unbending as it is would prove dangerous in these diplomatic times through which the Church is passing. And so I should in no wise be astonished if there were an attempt to discredit him and render his candidature impossible, by employing the most underhand and shameful means."

A little quiver of fear was coming over Pierre. The contagion of the unknown, of the black intrigues plotted in the dark, was spreading amidst the silence of the night in the depths of that palace, near that Tiber, in that Rome so full of legendary tragedies. But all at once the young man's mind reverted to himself, to his own affair. "But what is my part in all this?" he asked: "why does Monsignor Nani seem to take an interest in me? Why is he mixed up in the proceedings against my book?"

"Oh! one never knows, one never knows exactly!" replied Don Vigilio, waving his arms. "One thing I can say, that he only knew of the affair when the denunciations of the three bishops were already in the hands of Father Dangelis; and I have also learnt that he then tried to stop the proceedings, which he no doubt thought both useless and impolitic. But when a matter is once before the Congregation it is almost impossible for it to be withdrawn, and Monsignor Nani must also have come into collision with Father Dangelis who, like a faithful Dominican, is the passionate adversary of the Jesuits. It was then that he caused the Contessina to write to Monsieur de la Choue, requesting him to tell you to hasten here in order to defend yourself, and to arrange for your acceptance of hospitality in this mansion, during your stay."

This revelation brought Pierre's emotion to a climax. "You are sure of that?" he asked.

"Oh! quite sure. I heard Nani speak of you one Monday, and some time ago I told you that he seemed to know all about you, as if he had made most minute inquiries. My belief is that he had already read your book, and was extremely preoccupied about it."

"Do you think that he shares my ideas, then? Is he sincere, is he defending himself while striving to defend me?"

"Oh! no, no, not at all. Your ideas, why he certainly hates them, and your book and yourself as well. You have no idea what contempt for the weak, what hatred of the poor, and love of authority and domination he conceals under his caressing amiability.

Lourdes he might abandon to you, though it embodies a marvellous weapon of government; but he will never forgive you for being on the side of the little ones of the world, and for pronouncing against the temporal power. If you only heard with what gentle ferocity he derides Monsieur de la Choue, whom he calls the weeping willow of Neo-Catholicism!"

Pierre carried his hands to his temples and pressed his head despairingly. "Then why, why, tell me I beg of you, why has he brought me here and kept me here in this house at his disposal? Why has he promenaded me up and down Rome for three long months, throwing me against obstacles and wearying me, when it was so easy for him to let the Index condemn my book if it embarrassed him? It's true, of course, that things would not have gone quietly, for I was disposed to refuse submission and openly confess my new faith, even against the decisions of Rome."

Don Vigilio's black eyes flared in his yellow face: "Perhaps it was that which he wished to prevent. He knows you to be very intelligent and enthusiastic, and I have often heard him say that intelligence and enthusiasm should not be fought openly."

Pierre, however, had risen to his feet, and instead of listening, was striding up and down the room as though carried away by the whirlwind of his thoughts. "Come, come," he said at last, "it is necessary that I should know and understand things if I am to continue the struggle. You must be kind enough to give me some detailed particulars about each of the persons mixed up in my affair. Jesuits, Jesuits everywhere?

Mon Dieu, it may be so, you are perhaps right! But all the same you must point out the different shades to me. Now, for instance, what of that Fornaro?"

"Monsignor Fornaro, oh! he's whatever you like. Still he also was brought up at the Collegio Romano, so you may be certain that he is a Jesuit, a Jesuit by education, position, and ambition. He is longing to become a cardinal, and if he some day becomes one, he'll long to be the next pope. Besides, you know, every one here is a candidate to the papacy as soon as he enters the seminary."

"And Cardinal Sanguinetti?"

"A Jesuit, a Jesuit! To speak plainly, he was one, then ceased to be one, and is now undoubtedly one again. Sanguinetti has flirted with every influence. It was long thought that he was in favour of conciliation between the Holy See and Italy; but things drifted into a bad way, and he violently took part against the usurpers. In the same style he has frequently fallen out with Leo XIII and then made his peace. To-day at the Vatican, he keeps on a footing of diplomatic reserve. Briefly he only has one object, the tiara, and even shows it too plainly, which is a mistake, for it uses up a candidate. Still, just at present the struggle seems to be between him and Cardinal Boccanera. And that's why he has gone over to the Jesuits again, utilising their hatred of his rival, and anticipating that they will be forced to support *him* in order to defeat the other. But I doubt it, they are too shrewd, they will hesitate to patronise a candidate who is already so compromised. He, blunder-head, passionate and proud as he is,

doubts nothing, and since you say that he is now at Frascati, I'm certain that he made all haste to shut himself up there with some grand, strategical object in view, as soon as he heard of the Pope's illness."

"Well, and the Pope himself, Leo XIII?" asked Pierre.

This time Don Vigilio slightly hesitated, his eyes blinking. Then he said: "Leo XIII? He is a Jesuit, a Jesuit! Oh! I know it is said that he sides with the Dominicans, and this is in a measure true, for he fancies that he is animated with their spirit and he has brought St. Thomas into favour again, and has restored all the ecclesiastical teaching of doctrine. But there is also the Jesuit, remember, who is one involuntarily and without knowing it, and of this category the present Pope will prove the most famous example. Study his acts, investigate his policy, and you will find that everything in it emanates from the Jesuit spirit. The fact is that he has unwittingly become impregnated with that spirit, and that all the influence, directly or indirectly brought to bear on him comes from a Jesuit centre. Ah! why don't you believe me? I repeat that the Jesuits have conquered and absorbed everything, that all Rome belongs to them from the most insignificant cleric to his Holiness in person."

Then he continued, replying to each fresh name that Pierre gave with the same obstinate, maniacal cry: "Jesuit, Jesuit!" It seemed as if a Churchman could be nothing else, as if each answer were a confirmation of the proposition that the clergy must compound with the modern world if it desired to pre-

serve its Deity. The heroic age of Catholicism was accomplished, henceforth it could only live by dint of diplomacy and ruses, concessions and arrangements. "And that Paparelli, he's a Jesuit too, a Jesuit!" Don Vigilio went on, instinctively lowering his voice. "Yes, the humble but terrible Jesuit, the Jesuit in his most abominable rôle as a spy and a perverter! I could swear that he has merely been placed here in order to keep watch on his Eminence! And you should see with what supple talent and craft he has performed his task, to such a point indeed that it is now he alone who wills and orders things. He opens the door to whomsoever he pleases, uses his master like something belonging to him, weighs on each of his resolutions, and holds him in his power by dint of his stealthy unremitting efforts. Yes! it's the lion conquered by the insect; the infinitesimally small disposing of the infinitely great; the train-bearer—whose proper part is to sit at his cardinal's feet like a faithful hound—in reality reigning over him, and impelling him in whatsoever direction he chooses. Ah! the Jesuit! the Jesuit! Mistrust him when you see him gliding by in his shabby old cassock, with the flabby wrinkled face of a devout old maid. And make sure that he isn't behind the doors, or in the cupboards, or under the beds. Ah! I tell you that they'll devour you as they've devoured me; and they'll give you the fever too, perhaps even the plague if you are not careful!"

Pierre suddenly halted in front of his companion. He was losing all assurance, both fear and rage were penetrating him. And, after all, why not? These

extraordinary stories must be true. "But in that case give me some advice," he exclaimed, "I asked you to come in here this evening precisely because I no longer know what to do, and need to be set in the right path—" Then he broke off and again paced to and fro, as if urged into motion by his exploding passion. "Or rather no, tell me nothing!" he abruptly resumed. "It's all over; I prefer to go away. The thought occurred to me before, but it was in a moment of cowardice and with the idea of disappearing and of returning to live in peace in my little nook: whereas now, if I go off, it will be as an avenger, a judge, to cry aloud to all the world from Paris, to proclaim what I have seen in Rome, what men have done there with the Christianity of Jesus, the Vatican falling into dust, the corpse-like odour which comes from it, the idiotic illusions of those who hope that they will one day see a renaissance of the modern soul arise from a sepulchre where the remnants of dead centuries rot and slumber. Oh! I will not yield, I will not make my submission, I will defend my book by a fresh one. And that book, I promise you, will make some noise in the world, for it will sound the last agony of a dying religion, which one must make all haste to bury lest its remains should poison the nations!"

All this was beyond Don Vigilio's mind. The Italian priest, with narrow belief and ignorant terror of the new ideas, awoke within him. He clasped his hands, affrighted. "Be quiet, be quiet! You are blaspheming! And, besides, you cannot go off like

that without again trying to see his Holiness. He alone is sovereign. And I know that I shall surprise you; but Father Dangelis has given you in jest the only good advice that can be given: Go back to see Monsignor Nani, for he alone will open the door of the Vatican for you."

Again did Pierre give a start of anger: "What! It was with Monsignor Nani that I began, from him that I set out; and I am to go back to him? What game is that? Can I consent to be a shuttlecock sent flying hither and thither by every battledore? People are having a game with me!"

Then, harassed and distracted, the young man fell on his chair in front of Don Vigilio, who with his face drawn by his prolonged vigil, and his hands still and ever faintly trembling, remained for some time silent. At last he explained that he had another idea. He was slightly acquainted with the Pope's confessor, a Franciscan father, a man of great simplicity, to whom he might recommend Pierre. This Franciscan, despite his self-effacement, would perhaps prove of service to him. At all events he might be tried. Then, once more, silence fell, and Pierre, whose dreamy eyes were turned towards the wall, ended by distinguishing the old picture which had touched him so deeply on the day of his arrival. In the pale glow of the lamp it gradually showed forth and lived, like an incarnation of his own case, his own futile despair before the sternly closed portal of truth and justice. Ah! that outcast woman, that stubborn victim of love, weeping amidst her streaming hair, her visage hidden whilst with pain and grief she sank upon the steps of

that palace whose door was so pitilessly shut—how she resembled him! Draped with a mere strip of linen, she was shivering, and amidst the overpowering distress of her abandonment she did not reveal her secret, misfortune, or transgression, whichever it might be. But he, behind her close-pressed hands, endowed her with a face akin to his own: she became his sister, as were all the poor creatures without roof or certainty who weep because they are naked and alone, and wear out their strength in seeking to force the wicked thresholds of men. He could never gaze at her without pitying her, and it stirred him so much that evening to find her ever so unknown, nameless and visageless, yet steeped in the most bitter tears, that he suddenly began to question his companion.

"Tell me," said he, "do you know who painted that old picture? It stirs me to the soul like a masterpiece."

Stupefied by this unexpected question, the secretary raised his head and looked, feeling yet more astonished when he had examined the blackened, forsaken panel in its sorry frame.

"Where did it come from?" resumed Pierre; "why has it been stowed away in this room?"

"Oh!" replied Don Vigilio, with a gesture of indifference, "it's nothing. There are heaps of valueless old paintings everywhere. That one, no doubt, has always been here. But I don't know; I never noticed it before."

Whilst speaking he had at last risen to his feet, and this simple action had brought on such a fit of shivering that he could scarcely take leave, so vio-

lently did his teeth chatter with fever. "No, no, don't show me out," he stammered, "keep the lamp here. And to conclude: the best course is for you to leave yourself in the hands of Monsignor Nani, for he, at all events, is a superior man. I told you on your arrival that, whether you would or not, you would end by doing as he desired. And so what's the use of struggling? And mind, not a word of our conversation to-night; it would mean my death."

Then he noiselessly opened the doors, glanced distrustfully into the darkness of the passage, and at last ventured out and disappeared, regaining his own room with such soft steps that not the faintest footfall was heard amidst the tomb-like slumber of the old mansion.

On the morrow, Pierre, again mastered by a desire to fight on to the very end, got Don Vigilio to recommend him to the Pope's confessor, the Franciscan friar with whom the secretary was slightly acquainted. However, this friar proved to be an extremely timid if worthy man, selected precisely on account of his great modesty, simplicity, and absolute lack of influence in order that he might not abuse his position with respect to the Holy Father. And doubtless there was an affectation of humility on the latter's part in taking for confessor a member of the humblest of the regular orders, a friend of the poor, a holy beggar of the roads. At the same time the friar certainly enjoyed a reputation for oratory; and hidden by a veil the Pope at times listened to his sermons; for although as infallible Sovereign Pontiff Leo XIII could not receive lessons from any priest, it was admitted that as a man he might reap profit by listening to good dis-

course. Nevertheless apart from his natural eloquence, the worthy friar was really a mere washer of souls, a confessor who listens and absolves without even remembering the impurities which he removes in the waters of penitence. And Pierre, finding him really so poor and such a cipher, did not insist on an intervention which he realised would be futile.

All that day the young priest was haunted by the figure of that ingenuous lover of poverty, that delicious St. Francis, as Narcisse Habert was wont to say. Pierre had often wondered how such an apostle, so gentle towards both animate and inanimate creation, and so full of ardent charity for the wretched, could have arisen in a country of egotism and enjoyment like Italy, where the love of beauty alone has remained queen. Doubtless the times have changed; yet what a strong sap of love must have been needed in the old days, during the great sufferings of the middle ages, for such a consoler of the humble to spring from the popular soil and preach the gift of self to others, the renunciation of wealth, the horror of brutal force, the equality and obedience which would ensure the peace of the world. St. Francis trod the roads clad as one of the poorest, a rope girdling his grey gown and his bare feet shod with sandals, and he carried with him neither purse nor staff. And he and his brethren spoke aloud and freely, with sovereign florescence of poetry and boldness of truth, attacking the rich and the powerful, and daring even to denounce the priests of evil life, the debauched, simoniacal, and perjured bishops. A long cry of relief greeted the Franciscans, the people followed them in

crowds — they were the friends, the liberators of all the humble ones who suffered. And thus, like revolutionaries, they at first so alarmed Rome, that the popes hesitated to authorise their Order. When they at last gave way it was assuredly with the hope of using this new force for their own profit, by conquering the whole vague mass of the lowly whose covert threats have ever growled through the ages, even in the most despotic times. And thenceforward in the sons of St. Francis the Church possessed an ever victorious army — a wandering army which spread over the roads, in the villages and through the towns, penetrating to the firesides of artisan and peasant, and gaining possession of all simple hearts. How great the democratic power of such an Order which had sprung from the very entrails of the people! And thence its rapid prosperity, its teeming growth in a few years, friaries arising upon all sides, and the third Order¹ so invading the secular population as to impregnate and absorb it. And that there was here a genuine growth of the soil, a vigorous vegetation of the plebeian stock was shown by an entire national art arising from it — the precursors of the Renaissance in painting and even Dante himself, the soul of Italia's genius.

For some days now, in the Rome of the present

¹ The Franciscans, like the Dominicans and others, admit, in addition to the two Orders of friars and nuns, a third Order comprising devout persons of either sex who have neither the vocation nor the opportunity for cloistered life, but live in the world, privately observing the chief principles of the fraternity with which they are connected. In central and southern Europe members of these third Orders are still numerous. — *Trans.*

time, Pierre had been coming into contact with those great Orders of the past. The Franciscans and the Dominicans were there face to face in their vast convents of prosperous aspect. But it seemed as if the humility of the Franciscans had in the long run deprived them of influence. Perhaps, too, their rôle as friends and liberators of the people was ended since the people now undertook to liberate itself. And so the only real remaining battle was between the Dominicans and the Jesuits, both of whom still claimed to mould the world according to their particular views. Warfare between them was incessant, and Rome — the supreme power at the Vatican — was ever the prize for which they contended. But, although the Dominicans had St. Thomas on their side, they must have felt that their old dogmatic science was crumbling, compelled as they were each day to surrender a little ground to the Jesuits whose principles accorded better with the spirit of the century. And, in addition to these, there were the white-robed Carthusians, those very holy, pure, and silent meditators who fled from the world into quiet cells and cloisters, those despairing and consoled ones whose numbers may decrease but whose Order will live for ever, even as grief and desire for solitude will live. And then there were the Benedictines whose admirable rules have sanctified labour, passionate toilers in literature and science, once powerful instruments of civilisation, enlarging universal knowledge by their immense historical and critical works. These Pierre loved, and with them would have sought a refuge two centuries earlier, yet he was astonished to find them building on the Aven-

tine a huge dwelling, for which Leo XIII has already given millions, as if the science of to-day and to-morrow were yet a field where they might garner harvests. But *cui bono*, when the workmen have changed, and dogmas are there to bar the road — dogmas which totter, no doubt, but which believers may not fling aside in order to pass onward? And finally came the swarm of less important Orders, hundreds in number; there were the Carmelites, the Trappists, the Minims, the Barnabites, the Lazzarists, the Eudists, the Mission Fathers, the Servites, the Brothers of the Christian Doctrine; there were the Bernadines, the Augustinians, the Theatines, the Observants, the Passionists, the Celestines, and the Capuchins, without counting the corresponding Orders of women or the Poor Clares, or the innumerable nuns like those of the Visitation and the Calvary. Each community had its modest or sumptuous dwelling, certain districts of Rome were entirely composed of convents, and behind the silent lifeless façades all those people buzzed, intrigued, and waged the everlasting warfare of rival interests and passions. The social evolution which produced them had long since ceased, still they obstinately sought to prolong their life, growing weaker and more useless day by day, destined to a slow agony until the time shall come when the new development of society will leave them neither foothold nor breathing space.

And it was not only with the regulars that Pierre came in contact during his peregrinations through Rome; indeed, he more particularly had to deal with the secular clergy, and learnt to know them well. A hierarchical system which was still vigorously enforced

maintained them in various ranks and classes. Up above, around the Pope, reigned the pontifical family, the high and noble cardinals and prelates whose conceit was great in spite of their apparent familiarity. Below them the parish clergy formed a very worthy middle class of wise and moderate minds; and here patriot priests were not rare. Moreover, the Italian occupation of a quarter of a century, by installing in the city a world of functionaries who saw everything that went on, had, curiously enough, greatly purified the private life of the Roman priesthood, in which under the popes women, beyond all question, played a supreme part. And finally one came to the plebeian clergy whom Pierre studied with curiosity, a collection of wretched, grimy, half-naked priests who like famished animals prowled around in search of masses, and drifted into disreputable taverns in the company of beggars and thieves. However, he was more interested by the floating population of foreign priests from all parts of Christendom — the adventurers, the ambitious ones, the believers, the madmen whom Rome attracted just as a lamp at night time attracts the insects of the gloom. Among these were men of every nationality, position, and age, all lashed on by their appetites and scrambling from morn till eve around the Vatican, in order to snap at the prey which they hoped to secure. He found them everywhere, and told himself with some shame that he was one of them, that the unit of his own personality served to increase the incredible number of cassocks that one encountered in the streets. Ah! that ebb and flow, that ceaseless tide of black gowns and frocks

of every hue! With their processions of students ever walking abroad, the seminaries of the different nations would alone have sufficed to drape and decorate the streets, for there were the French and the English all in black, the South Americans in black with blue sashes, the North Americans in black with red sashes, the Poles in black with green sashes, the Greeks in blue, the Germans in red, the Scots in violet, the Romans in black or violet or purple, the Bohemians with chocolate sashes, the Irish with red lappets, the Spaniards with blue cords, to say nothing of all the others with broidery and bindings and buttons in a hundred different styles. And in addition there were the confraternities, the penitents, white, black, blue, and grey, with sleeveless frocks and capes of different hue, grey, blue, black, or white. And thus even nowadays Papal Rome at times seemed to resuscitate, and one could realise how tenaciously and vivaciously she struggled on in order that she might not disappear in the cosmopolitan Rome of the new era. However, Pierre, whilst running about from one prelate to another, frequenting priests and crossing churches, could not accustom himself to the worship, the Roman piety which astonished him when it did not wound him. One rainy Sunday morning, on entering Santa Maria Maggiore, he fancied himself in some waiting-room, a very splendid one, no doubt, but where God seemed to have no habitation. There was not a bench, not a chair in the nave, across which people passed, as they might pass through a railway station, wetting and soiling the precious mosaic pavement with their muddy shoes; and tired women and children sat

round the bases of the columns, even as in railway stations one sees people sitting and waiting for their trains during the great crushes of the holiday season. And for this tramping throng of folks of small degree, who had looked in *en passant*, a priest was saying a low mass in a side chapel, before which a narrow file of standing people had gathered, extending across the nave, and recalling the crowds which wait in front of theatres for the opening of the doors. At the elevation of the host one and all inclined themselves devoutly, but almost immediately afterwards the gathering dispersed. And indeed why linger? The mass was said. Pierre everywhere found the same form of attendance, peculiar to the countries of the sun; the worshippers were in a hurry and only favoured the Deity with short familiar visits, unless it were a question of some gala scene at San Paolo or San Giovanni in Laterano or some other of the old basilicas. It was only at the Gesù, on another Sunday morning, that the young priest came upon a high-mass congregation, which reminded him of the devout throngs of the North. Here there were benches and women seated, a worldly warmth and cosiness under the luxurious, gilded, carved, and painted roof, whose tawny splendour is very fine now that time has toned down the eccentricities of the decoration. But how many of the churches were empty, among them some of the most ancient and venerable, San Clemente, Sant' Agnese, Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, where during the offices one saw but a few believers of the neighbourhood. Four hundred churches were a good many for even Rome to people; and, indeed, some

were merely attended on fixed ceremonial occasions, and a good many merely opened their doors once every year — on the feast day, that is, of their patron saint. Some also subsisted on the lucky possession of a fetish, an idol compassionate to human sufferings. Santa Maria in Ara Cœli possessed the miraculous little Jesus, the “Bambino,” who healed sick children, and Sant’ Agostino had the “Madonna del Parto,” who grants a happy delivery to mothers. Then others were renowned for the holy water of their fonts, the oil of their lamps, the power of some wooden saint or marble virgin. Others again seemed forsaken, given up to tourists and the perquisites of beadles, like mere museums peopled with dead gods. Finally others disturbed one’s faith by the suggestiveness of their aspects, as, for instance, that Santa Maria Rotonda, which is located in the Pantheon, a circular hall recalling a circus, where the Virgin remains the evident tenant of the Olympian deities.

Pierre took no little interest in the churches of the poor districts, but did not find there the keen faith and the throngs he had hoped for. One afternoon, at Santa Maria in Trastevere, he heard the choir in full song, but the church was quite empty, and the chant had a most lugubrious sound in such a desert. Then, another day, on entering San Crisogono, he found it draped, probably in readiness for some festival on the morrow. The columns were cased with red damask, and between them were hangings and curtains alternately yellow and blue, white and red; and the young man fled from such a fearful decoration as gaudy as that of a fair booth. Ah! how far he was

from the cathedrals where in childhood he had believed and prayed! On all sides he found the same type of church, the antique basilica accommodated to the taste of eighteenth-century Rome. Though the style of San Luigi dei Francesi is better, more soberly elegant, the only thing that touched him even there was the thought of the heroic or saintly Frenchmen, who sleep in foreign soil beneath the flags. And as he sought for something Gothic, he ended by going to see Santa Maria sopra Minerva,¹ which, he was told, was the only example of the Gothic style in Rome. Here his stupefaction attained a climax at sight of the clustering columns cased in stucco imitating marble, the ogives which dared not soar, the rounded vaults condemned to the heavy majesty of the dome style. No, no, thought he, the faith whose cooling cinders lingered there was no longer that whose brazier had invaded and set all Christendom aglow! However, Monsignor Fornaro whom he chanced to meet as he was leaving the church, inveighed against the Gothic style as rank heresy. The first Christian church, said the prelate, had been the basilica, which had sprung from the temple, and it was blasphemy to assert that the Gothic cathedral was the real Christian house of prayer, for Gothic embodied the hateful Anglo-Saxon spirit, the rebellious genius of Luther. At this a passionate reply rose to Pierre's lips, but he said nothing for fear that he might say too much. However, he asked himself whether in all this there was not a decisive proof that Catholicism was the

¹ So called because it occupies the site of a temple to Minerva. — *Trans.*

very vegetation of Rome, Paganism modified by Christianity. Elsewhere Christianity has grown up in quite a different spirit, to such a point that it has risen in rebellion and schismatically turned against the mother-city. And the breach has ever gone on widening, the dissemblance has become more and more marked; and amidst the evolution of new societies, yet a fresh schism appears inevitable and proximate in spite of all the despairing efforts to maintain union.

While Pierre thus visited the Roman churches, he also continued his efforts to gain support in the matter of his book, his irritation tending to such stubbornness, that if in the first instance he failed to obtain an interview, he went back again and again to secure one, steadfastly keeping his promise to call in turn upon each cardinal of the Congregation of the Index. And as a cardinal may belong to several Congregations, it resulted that he gradually found himself roaming through those former ministries of the old pontifical government which, if less numerous than formerly, are still very intricate institutions, each with its cardinal-prefect, its cardinal-members, its consultative prelates, and its numerous employees. Pierre repeatedly had to return to the Cancelleria, where the Congregation of the Index meets, and lost himself in its world of staircases, corridors, and halls. From the moment he passed under the porticus he was overcome by the icy shiver which fell from the old walls, and was quite unable to appreciate the bare, frigid beauty of the palace, Bramante's masterpiece though it be, so purely typical of the Roman Renaissance. He also

knew the Propaganda where he had seen Cardinal Sarno; and, sent as he was hither and thither, in his efforts to gain over influential prelates, chance made him acquainted with the other Congregations, that of the Bishops and Regulars, that of the Rites and that of the Council. He even obtained a glimpse of the Consistorial, the Dataria,¹ and the sacred Penitentiary. All these formed part of the administrative mechanism of the Church under its several aspects — the government of the Catholic world, the enlargement of the Church's conquests, the administration of its affairs in conquered countries, the decision of all questions touching faith, morals, and individuals, the investigation and punishment of offences, the grant of dispensations and the sale of favours. One can scarcely imagine what a fearful number of affairs are each morning submitted to the Vatican, questions of the greatest gravity, delicacy, and intricacy, the solution of which gives rise to endless study and research. It is necessary to reply to the innumerable visitors who flock to Rome from all parts, and to the letters, the petitions, and the batches of documents which are submitted and require to be distributed among the various offices. And Pierre was struck by the deep and discreet silence in which all this colossal labour was accomplished; not a sound reaching the streets from the tribunals, parliaments, and factories for the manufacture of saints and nobles, whose

¹ It is from the Dataria that bulls, rescripts, letters of appointment to benefices, and dispensations of marriage, are issued, after the affixture of the date and formula *Datum Romæ*, "Given at Rome." — *Trans.*

mechanism was so well greased, that in spite of the rust of centuries and the deep and irremediable wear and tear, the whole continued working without clank or creak to denote its presence behind the walls. And did not that silence embody the whole policy of the Church, which is to remain mute and await developments? Nevertheless what a prodigious mechanism it was, antiquated no doubt, but still so powerful! And amidst those Congregations how keenly Pierre felt himself to be in the grip of the most absolute power ever devised for the domination of mankind. However much he might notice signs of decay and coming ruin he was none the less seized, crushed, and carried off by that huge engine made up of vanity and venality, corruption and ambition, meanness and greatness. And how far, too, he now was from the Rome that he had dreamt of, and what anger at times filled him amidst his weariness, as he persevered in his resolve to defend himself!

All at once certain things which he had never understood were explained to him. One day, when he returned to the Propaganda, Cardinal Sarno spoke to him of Freemasonry with such icy rage that he was abruptly enlightened. Freemasonry had hitherto made him smile; he had believed in it no more than he had believed in the Jesuits. Indeed, he had looked upon the ridiculous stories which were current — the stories of mysterious, shadowy men who governed the world with secret incalculable power — as mere childish legends. In particular he had been amazed by the blind hatred which maddened certain people as soon as Freemasonry was mentioned. However, a very distin-

guished and intelligent prelate had declared to him, with an air of profound conviction, that at least on one occasion every year each masonic Lodge was presided over by the Devil in person, incarnate in a visible shape! And now, by Cardinal Sarno's remarks, he understood the rivalry, the furious struggle of the Roman Catholic Church against that other Church, the Church of over the way.¹ Although the former counted on her own triumph, she none the less felt that the other, the Church of Freemasonry, was a competitor, a very ancient enemy, who indeed claimed to be more ancient than herself, and whose victory always remained a possibility. And the friction between them was largely due to the circumstance that they both aimed at universal sovereignty, and had a similar international organisation, a similar net thrown over the nations, and in a like way mysteries, dogmas, and rites. It was deity against deity, faith against faith, conquest against conquest: and so, like competing tradesmen in the same street, they were a source of mutual embarrassment, and one of them was bound to kill the other. But if Roman Catholicism seemed to Pierre to be worn out and threatened with

¹ Some readers may think the above passages an exaggeration, but such is not the case. The hatred with which the Catholic priesthood, especially in Italy, Spain, and France, regards Freemasonry is remarkable. At the moment of writing these lines I have before me several French clerical newspapers, which contain the most abusive articles levelled against President Faure solely because he is a Freemason. One of these prints, a leading journal of Lyons, tells the French President that he cannot serve both God and the Devil; and that if he cannot give up Freemasonry he would do well to cease desecrating the abode of the Deity by his attendance at divine service. — *Trans.*

ruin, he remained quite as sceptical with regard to the power of Freemasonry. He had made inquiries as to the reality of that power in Rome, where both Grand Master and Pope were enthroned, one in front of the other. He was certainly told that the last Roman princes had thought themselves compelled to become Freemasons in order to render their own difficult position somewhat easier and facilitate the future of their sons. But was this true? had they not simply yielded to the force of the present social evolution? And would not Freemasonry eventually be submerged by its own triumph—that of the ideas of justice, reason, and truth, which it had defended through the dark and violent ages of history? It is a thing which constantly happens; the victory of an idea kills the sect which has propagated it, and renders the apparatus with which the members of the sect surrounded themselves, in order to fire imaginations, both useless and somewhat ridiculous. Carbonarism did not survive the conquest of the political liberties which it demanded; and on the day when the Catholic Church crumbles, having accomplished its work of civilisation, the other Church, the Freemasons' Church of across the road, will in a like way disappear, its task of liberation ended. Nowadays the famous power of the Lodges, hampered by traditions, weakened by a ceremonial which provokes laughter, and reduced to a simple bond of brotherly agreement and mutual assistance, would be but a sorry weapon of conquest for humanity, were it not that the vigorous breath of science impels the nations onwards and helps to destroy the old religions.

However, all Pierre's journeyings and applications brought him no certainty; and, while stubbornly clinging to Rome, intent on fighting to the very end, like a soldier who will not believe in the possibility of defeat, he remained as anxious as ever. He had seen all the cardinals whose influence could be of use to him. He had seen the Cardinal Vicar, entrusted with the diocese of Rome, who, like the man of letters he was, had spoken to him of Horace, and, like a somewhat blundering politician, had questioned him about France, the Republic, the Army, and the Navy Estimates, without dealing in the slightest degree with the incriminated book. He had also seen the Grand Penitentiary, that tall old man, with fleshless, ascetic face, of whom he had previously caught a glimpse at the Boccanera mansion, and from whom he now only drew a long and severe sermon on the wickedness of young priests, whom the century had perverted and who wrote most abominable books. Finally, at the Vatican, he had seen the Cardinal Secretary, in some wise his Holiness's Minister of Foreign Affairs, the great power of the Holy See, whom he had hitherto been prevented from approaching by terrifying warnings as to the possible result of an unfavourable reception. However, whilst apologising for calling at such a late stage, he had found himself in presence of a most amiable man, whose somewhat rough appearance was softened by diplomatic affability, and who, after making him sit down, questioned him with an air of interest, listened to him, and even spoke some words of comfort. Nevertheless, on again reaching the Piazza of St. Peter's, Pierre well understood that his

affair had not made the slightest progress, and that if he ever managed to force the Pope's door, it would not be by way of the Secretariate of State. And that evening he returned home quite exhausted by so many visits, in such distraction at feeling that little by little he had been wholly caught in that huge mechanism with its hundred wheels, that he asked himself in terror what he should do on the morrow now that there remained nothing for him to do — unless, indeed, it were to go mad.

However, meeting Don Vigilio in a passage of the house, he again wished to ask him for some good advice. But the secretary, who had a gleam of terror in his eyes, silenced him, he knew not why, with an anxious gesture. And then in a whisper, in Pierre's ear, he said: "Have you seen Monsignor Nani? No! Well, go to see him, go to see him. I repeat that you have nothing else to do!"

Pierre yielded. And indeed why should he have resisted? Apart from the motives of ardent charity which had brought him to Rome to defend his book, was he not there for a self-educating, experimental purpose? It was necessary that he should carry his attempts to the very end.

On the morrow, when he reached the colonnade of St. Peter's, the hour was so early that he had to wait there awhile. He had never better realised the enormity of those four curving rows of columns, forming a forest of gigantic stone trunks among which nobody ever promenades. In fact, the spot is a grandiose and dreary desert, and one asks oneself the why and wherefore of such a majestic porticus. Doubtless,

however, it was for its sole majesty, for the mere pomp of decoration, that this colonnade was reared; and therein, again, one finds the whole Roman spirit. However, Pierre at last turned into the Via di Sant' Offizio, and passing the sacristy of St. Peter's, found himself before the Palace of the Holy Office in a solitary silent district, which the footfall of pedestrians or the rumble of wheels but seldom disturbs. The sun alone lives there, in sheets of light which spread slowly over the small, white paving. You divine the vicinity of the Basilica, for there is a smell as of incense, a cloisteral quiescence as of the slumber of centuries. And at one corner the Palace of the Holy Office rises up with heavy, disquieting bareness, only a single row of windows piercing its lofty, yellow front. The wall which skirts a side street looks yet more suspicious with its row of even smaller case-ments, mere peep-holes with glaucous panes. In the bright sunlight this huge cube of mud-coloured masonry ever seems asleep, mysterious, and closed like a prison, with scarcely an aperture for communication with the outer world.

Pierre shivered, but then smiled as at an act of childishness, for he reflected that the Holy Roman and Universal Inquisition, nowadays the Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office, was no longer the institution it had been, the purveyor of heretics for the stake, the occult tribunal beyond appeal which had right of life and death over all mankind. True, it still laboured in secrecy, meeting every Wednesday, and judging and condemning without a sound issuing from within its walls. But on the other hand if it still continued to

strike at the crime of heresy, if it smote men as well as their works, it no longer possessed either weapons or dungeons, steel or fire to do its bidding, but was reduced to a mere rôle of protest, unable to inflict aught but disciplinary penalties even upon the ecclesiastics of its own Church.

When Pierre on entering was ushered into the reception-room of Monsignor Nani who, as assessor, lived in the palace, he experienced an agreeable surprise. The apartment faced the south, and was spacious and flooded with sunshine. And stiff as was the furniture, dark as were the hangings, an exquisite sweetness pervaded the room, as though a woman had lived in it and accomplished the prodigy of imparting some of her own grace to all those stern-looking things. There were no flowers, yet there was a pleasant smell. A charm expanded and conquered every heart from the very threshold.

Monsignor Nani at once came forward, with a smile on his rosy face, his blue eyes keenly glittering, and his fine light hair powdered by age. With hands outstretched, he exclaimed: "Ah! how kind of you to have come to see me, my dear son! Come, sit down, let us have a friendly chat." Then with an extraordinary display of affection, he began to question Pierre: "How are you getting on? Tell me all about it, exactly what you have done."

Touched in spite of Don Vigilio's revelations, won over by the sympathy which he fancied he could detect, Pierre thereupon confessed himself, relating his visits to Cardinal Sarno, Monsignor Fornaro and Father Dangelis, his applications to all the influential cardi-

nals, those of the Index, the Grand Penitentiary, the Cardinal Vicar, and the Cardinal Secretary; and dwelling on his endless journeys from door to door through all the Congregations and all the clergy, that huge, active, silent bee-hive amidst which he had wearied his feet, exhausted his limbs, and bewildered his poor brain. And at each successive Station of this Calvary of entreaty, Monsignor Nani, who seemed to listen with an air of rapture, exclaimed: "But that's very good, that's capital! Oh! your affair is progressing. Yes, yes, it's progressing marvellously well."

He was exultant, though he allowed no unseemly irony to appear, while his pleasant, penetrating eyes fathomed the young priest, to ascertain if he had been brought to the requisite degree of obedience. Had he been sufficiently wearied, disillusioned and instructed in the reality of things, for one to finish with him? Had three months' sojourn in Rome sufficed to turn the somewhat mad enthusiast of the first days into an unimpassioned or at least resigned being?

However, all at once Monsignor Nani remarked: "But, my dear son, you tell me nothing of his Eminence Cardinal Sanguinetti."

"The fact is, Monseigneur, that his Eminence is at Frascati, so I have been unable to see him."

Thereupon the prelate, as if once more postponing the *dénouement* with the secret enjoyment of an artistic *diplomate*, began to protest, raising his little plump hands with the anxious air of a man who considers everything lost: "Oh! but you must see his Eminence; it is absolutely necessary! Think of it! The Prefect of the Index! We can only act after your

visit to him, for as you have not seen *him* it is as if you had seen nobody. Go, go to Frascati, my dear son."

And thereupon Pierre could only bow and reply :
"I will go, Monseigneur."

XI

ALTHOUGH Pierre knew that he would be unable to see Cardinal Sanguinetti before eleven o'clock, he nevertheless availed himself of an early train, so that it was barely nine when he alighted at the little station of Frascati. He had already visited the place during his enforced idleness, when he had made the classical excursion to the Roman castles which extend from Frascati to Rocco di Papa, and from Rocco di Papa to Monte Cavo, and he was now delighted with the prospect of strolling for a couple of hours along those first slopes of the Alban hills, where, amidst rushes, olives, and vines, Frascati, like a promontory, overlooks the immense ruddy sea of the Campagna even as far as Rome, which, six full leagues away, wears the whitish aspect of a marble isle.

Ah! that charming Frascati, on its greeny knoll at the foot of the wooded Tusculan heights, with its famous terrace whence one enjoys the finest view in the world, its old patrician villas with proud and elegant Renaissance façades and magnificent parks, which, planted with cypress, pine, and ilex, are for ever green! There was a sweetness, a delight, a fascination about the spot, of which Pierre would have never wearied. And for more than an hour he had wandered blissfully along roads edged with ancient, knotty

olive-trees, along dingle ways shaded by the spreading foliage of neighbouring estates, and along perfumed paths, at each turn of which the Campagna was seen stretching far away, when all at once he was accosted by a person whom he was both surprised and annoyed to meet. He had strolled down to some low ground near the railway station, some old vineyards where a number of new houses had been built of recent years, and suddenly saw a stylish pair-horse victoria, coming from the direction of Rome, draw up close by, whilst its occupant called to him: "What! Monsieur l'Abbé Froment, are you taking a walk here, at this early hour?"

Thereupon Pierre recognised Count Luigi Prada, who alighted, shook hands with him and began to walk beside him, whilst the empty carriage went on in advance. And forthwith the Count explained his tastes: "I seldom take the train," he said, "I drive over. It gives my horses an outing. I have interests over here as you may know, a big building enterprise which is unfortunately not progressing very well. And so, although the season is advanced, I'm obliged to come rather more frequently than I care to do."

As Prada suggested, Pierre was acquainted with the story. The Boccaneras had been obliged to sell a sumptuous villa which a cardinal of their family had built at Frascati in accordance with the plans of Giacomo della Porta, during the latter part of the sixteenth century: a regal summer residence it had been, finely wooded, with groves and basins and cascades, and in particular a famous terrace projecting like a cape above the Roman Campagna whose expanse

stretches from the Sabine mountains to the Mediterranean sands. Through the division of the property, Benedetta had inherited from her mother some very extensive vineyards below Frascati, and these she had brought as dowry to Prada at the very moment when the building mania was extending from Rome into the provinces. And thereupon Prada had conceived the idea of erecting on the spot a number of middle-class villas like those which litter the suburbs of Paris. Few purchasers, however, had come forward, the financial crash had supervened, and he was now with difficulty liquidating this unlucky business, having indemnified his wife at the time of their separation.

"And then," he continued, addressing Pierre, "one can come and go as one likes with a carriage, whereas, on taking the train, one is at the mercy of the time table. This morning, for instance, I have appointments with contractors, experts, and lawyers, and I have no notion how long they will keep me. It's a wonderful country, isn't it? And we are quite right to be proud of it in Rome. Although I may have some worries just now, I can never set foot here without my heart beating with delight."

A circumstance which he did not mention, was that his *amica*, Lisbeth Kauffmann, had spent the summer in one of the newly erected villas, where she had installed her studio and had been visited by all the foreign colony, which tolerated her irregular position on account of her gay spirits and artistic talent. Indeed, people had even ended by accepting the outcome of her connection with Prada, and a fortnight previously

she had returned to Rome, and there given birth to a son — an event which had again revived all the scandalous tittle-tattle respecting Benedetta's divorce suit. And Prada's attachment to Frascati doubtless sprang from the recollection of the happy hours he had spent there, and the joyful pride with which the birth of the boy inspired him.

Pierre, for his part, felt ill at ease in the young Count's presence, for he had an instinctive hatred of money-mongers and men of prey. Nevertheless, he desired to respond to his amiability, and so inquired after his father, old Orlando, the hero of the Liberation.

"Oh!" replied Prada, "excepting for his legs he's in wonderfully good health. He'll live a hundred years. Poor father! I should so much have liked to install him in one of these little houses, last summer. But I could not get him to consent; he's determined not to leave Rome; he's afraid, perhaps, that it might be taken away from him during his absence." Then the young Count burst into a laugh, quite merry at the thought of jeering at the heroic but no longer fashionable age of independence. And afterwards he said, "My father was speaking of you again only yesterday, Monsieur l'Abbé. He is astonished that he has not seen you lately."

This distressed Pierre, for he had begun to regard Orlando with respectful affection. Since his first visit, he had twice called on the old hero, but the latter had refused to broach the subject of Rome so long as his young friend should not have seen, felt, and understood everything. There would be time for a talk

later on, said he, when they were both in a position to formulate their conclusions.

"Pray tell Count Orlando," responded Pierre, "that I have not forgotten him, and that, if I have deferred a fresh visit, it is because I desire to satisfy him. However, I certainly will not leave Rome without going to tell him how deeply his kind greeting has touched me."

Whilst talking, the two men slowly followed the ascending road past the newly erected villas, several of which were not yet finished. And when Prada learned that the priest had come to call on Cardinal Sanguinetti, he again laughed, with the laugh of a good-natured wolf, showing his white fangs. "True," he exclaimed, "the Cardinal has been here since the Pope has been laid up. Ah! you'll find him in a pretty fever."

"Why?"

"Why, because there's bad news about the Holy Father this morning. When I left Rome it was rumoured that he had spent a fearful night."

So speaking, Prada halted at a bend of the road, not far from an antique chapel, a little church of solitary, mournful grace of aspect, on the verge of an olive grove. Beside it stood a ruinous building, the old parsonage, no doubt, whence there suddenly emerged a tall, knotty priest with coarse and earthy face, who, after roughly locking the door, went off in the direction of the town.

"Ah!" resumed the Count in a tone of raillery, "that fellow's heart also must be beating violently; he's surely gone to your Cardinal in search of news."

Pierre had looked at the priest. "I know him," he replied; "I saw him, I remember, on the day after my arrival at Cardinal Boccanera's. He brought the Cardinal a basket of figs and asked him for a certificate in favour of his young brother, who had been sent to prison for some deed of violence—a knife thrust if I recollect rightly. However, the Cardinal absolutely refused him the certificate."

"It's the same man," said Prada, "you may depend on it. He was often at the Villa Boccanera formerly; for his young brother was gardener there. But he's now the client, the creature of Cardinal Sanguinetti. Santobono his name is, and he's a curious character, such as you wouldn't find in France, I fancy. He lives all alone in that falling hovel, and officiates at that old chapel of St. Mary in the Fields, where people don't go to hear mass three times in a year. Yes, it's a perfect sinecure, which with its stipend of a thousand francs enables him to live there like a peasant philosopher, cultivating the somewhat extensive garden whose big walls you see yonder."

The close to which he called attention stretched down the slope behind the parsonage, without an aperture, like some savage place of refuge into which not even the eye could penetrate. And all that could be seen above the left-hand wall was a superb, gigantic fig-tree, whose big leaves showed blackly against the clear sky. Prada had moved on again, and continued to speak of Santobono, who evidently interested him. Fancy, a patriot priest, a Garibaldian! Born at Nemi, in that yet savage nook among the Alban hills, he belonged to the people and was still near to the soil.

However, he had studied, and knew sufficient history to realise the past greatness of Rome, and dream of the re-establishment of Roman dominion as represented by young Italy. And he had come to believe, with passionate fervour, that only a great pope could realise his dream by seizing upon power, and then conquering all the other nations. And what could be easier, since the Pope commanded millions of Catholics? Did not half Europe belong to him? France, Spain, and Austria would give way as soon as they should see him powerful, dictating laws to the world. Germany and Great Britain, indeed all the Protestant countries, would also inevitably be conquered, for the papacy was the only dike that could be opposed to error, which must some day fatally succumb in its efforts against such a barrier. Politically, however, Santobono had declared himself for Germany, for he considered that France needed to be crushed before she would throw herself into the arms of the Holy Father. And thus contradictions and fancies clashed in his foggy brain, whose burning ideas swiftly turned to violence under the influence of primitive, racial fierceness. Briefly, the priest was a barbarian upholder of the Gospel, a friend of the humble and woful, a sectarian of that school which is capable alike of great virtues and great crimes.

"Yes," concluded Prada, "he is now devoted to Cardinal Sanguinetti because he believes that the latter will prove the great pope of to-morrow, who is to make Rome the one capital of the nations. At the same time he doubtless harbours a lower personal ambition, that of attaining to a canonry or of gaining

assistance in the little worries of life, as when he wished to extricate his brother from trouble. Here, you know, people stake their luck on a cardinal just as they nurse a 'trey' in the lottery, and if their cardinal proves the winning number and becomes pope they gain a fortune. And that's why you now see Santobono striding along yonder, all anxiety to know if Leo XIII will die and Sanguinetti don the tiara."

"Do you think the Pope so very ill, then?" asked Pierre, both anxious and interested.

The Count smiled and raised both arms: "Ah!" said he, "can one ever tell? They all get ill when their interest lies that way. However, I believe that the Pope is this time really indisposed; a complaint of the bowels, it is said; and at his age, you know, the slightest indisposition may prove fatal."

The two men took a few steps in silence, then the priest again asked a question: "Would Cardinal Sanguinetti have a great chance if the Holy See were vacant?"

"A great chance! Ah! that's another of those things which one never knows. The truth is people class Sanguinetti among the acceptable candidates, and if personal desire sufficed he would certainly be the next pope, for ambition consumes him to the marrow, and he displays extraordinary passion and determination in his efforts to succeed. But therein lies his very weakness; he is using himself up, and he knows it. And so he must be resolved to every step during the last days of battle. You may be quite sure that if he has shut himself up here at this critical time, it is in order that he may the better

direct his operations from a distance, whilst at the same time feigning a retreat, a disinterestedness which is bound to have a good effect."

Then Prada began to expatiate on Sanguinetti with no little complacency, for he liked the man's spirit of intrigue, his keen, conquering appetite, his excessive, and even somewhat blundering activity. He had become acquainted with him on his return from the nunciature at Vienna, when he had already resolved to win the tiara. That ambition explained everything, his quarrels and reconciliations with the reigning pope, his affection for Germany, followed by a sudden evolution in the direction of France, his varying attitude with regard to Italy, at first a desire for agreement, and then absolute rejection of all compromises, a refusal to grant any concession, so long as Rome should not be evacuated. This, indeed, seemed to be Sanguinetti's definite position; he made a show of disliking the wavering sway of Leo XIII, and of retaining a fervent admiration for Pius IX, the great, heroic pope of the days of resistance, whose goodness of heart had proved no impediment to unshakable firmness. And all this was equivalent to a promise that he, Sanguinetti, would again make kindness exempt from weakness, the rule of the Church, and would steer clear of the dangerous compounding of politics. At bottom, however, politics were his only dream, and he had even formulated a complete programme of intentional vagueness, which his clients and creatures spread abroad with an air of rapturous mystery. However, since a previous indisposition of the Pope's, during the spring, he had been living in mortal dis-

quietude, for it had then been rumoured that the Jesuits would resign themselves to support Cardinal Pio Boccanera, although the latter scarcely favoured them. He was rough and stern, no doubt, and his extreme bigotry might be a source of danger in this tolerant age; but, on the other hand, was he not a patrician, and would not his election imply that the papacy would never cease to claim the temporal power? From that moment Boccanera had been the one man whom Sanguinetti feared, for he beheld himself despoiled of his prize, and spent his time in devising plans to rid himself of such a powerful rival, repeating abominable stories of Cardinal Pio's alleged complaisance with regard to Benedetta and Dario, and incessantly representing him as Anti-christ, the man of sin, whose reign would consummate the ruin of the papacy. Finally, to regain the support of the Jesuits, Sanguinetti's last idea was to repeat through his familiars that for his part he would not merely maintain the principle of the temporal power intact, but would even undertake to regain that power. And he had a full plan on the subject, which folks confided to one another in whispers, a plan which, in spite of its apparent concessions, would lead to the overwhelming victory of the Church. It was to raise the prohibition which prevented Catholics from voting or becoming candidates at the Italian elections; to send a hundred, then two hundred, and then three hundred deputies to the Chamber, and in that wise to overthrow the House of Savoy, and establish a Federation of the Italian provinces, whereof the Holy Father, once more placed in

possession of Rome, would become the august and sovereign President.

As Prada finished he again laughed, showing his white teeth — teeth which would never readily relinquish the prey they held. “So you see,” he added, “we need to defend ourselves, since it’s a question of turning us out. Fortunately, there are some little obstacles in the way of that. Nevertheless, such dreams naturally have great influence on excited minds, such as that of Santobono, for instance. He’s a man whom one word from Sanguinetti would lead far indeed. Ah! he has good legs. Look at him up yonder, he has already reached the Cardinal’s little palace — that white villa with the sculptured balconies.”

Pierre raised his eyes and perceived the episcopal residence, which was one of the first houses of Frascati. Of modern construction and Renaissance style, it overlooked the immensity of the Roman Campagna.

It was now eleven o’clock, and as the young priest, before going up to pay his own visit, bade the Count good-bye, the latter for a moment kept hold of his hand. “Do you know,” said he, “it would be very kind of you to lunch with me — will you? Come and join me at that restaurant yonder with the pink front as soon as you are at liberty. I shall have settled my own business in an hour’s time, and I shall be delighted to have your company at table.”

Pierre began by declining, but he could offer no possible excuse, and at last surrendered, won over, despite himself, by Prada’s real charm of manner. When they had parted, the young priest only had to climb a street in order to reach the Cardinal’s door.

With his natural expansiveness and craving for popularity, Sanguinetti was easy of access, and at Frascati in particular his doors were flung open even to the most humble cassocks. So Pierre was at once ushered in, a circumstance which somewhat surprised him, for he remembered the bad humour of the servant whom he had seen on calling at the Cardinal's residence in Rome, when he had been advised to forego the journey, as his Eminence did not like to be disturbed when he was ill. However, nothing spoke of illness in that pleasant villa, flooded with sunshine. True, the waiting-room, where he was momentarily left alone, displayed neither luxury nor comfort; but it was brightened by the finest light in the world, and overlooked that extraordinary Campagna, so flat, so bare, and so unique in its beauty, for in front of it one ever dreams and sees the past arise. And so, whilst waiting, Pierre stationed himself at an open window, conducting on to a balcony, and his eyes roamed over the endless sea of herbage to the far-away whiteness of Rome, above which rose the dome of St. Peter's, at that distance a mere sparkling speck, barely as large as the nail of one's little finger.

However, the young man had scarcely taken up this position when he was surprised to hear some people talking, their words reaching him with great distinctness. And on leaning forward he realised that his Eminence in person was standing on another balcony close by, and conversing with a priest, only a portion of whose cassock could be seen. Still, this sufficed for Pierre to recognise Santobono. His first impulse, dictated by natural discretion, was to withdraw from

the window, but the words he next heard riveted him to the spot.

"We shall know in a moment," his Eminence was saying in his full voice. "I sent Eufemio to Rome, for he is the only person in whom I've any confidence. And see, there is the train bringing him back."

A train, still as small as a plaything, could in fact be seen approaching over the vast plain, and doubtless it was to watch for its arrival that Sanguinetti had stationed himself on the balcony. And there he lingered, with his eyes fixed on distant Rome. Then Santobono, in a passionate voice, spoke some words which Pierre imperfectly understood, but the Cardinal with clear articulation rejoined, "Yes, yes, my dear fellow, a catastrophe would be a great misfortune. Ah! may his Holiness long be preserved to us." Then he paused, and as he was no hypocrite, gave full expression to the thoughts which were in his mind: "At least, I hope that he will be preserved just now, for the times are bad, and I am in frightful anguish. The partisans of Antichrist have lately gained much ground."

A cry escaped Santobono: "Oh! your Eminence will act and triumph."

"I, my dear fellow? What would you have *me* do? I am simply at the disposal of my friends, those who are willing to believe in me, with the sole object of ensuring the victory of the Holy See. It is they who ought to act, it is they — each according to the measure of his means — who ought to bar the road to the wicked in order that the righteous may succeed. Ah! if Antichrist should reign —"

The recurrence of this word Antichrist greatly disturbed Pierre; but he suddenly remembered what the Count had told him: Antichrist was Cardinal Boccanera.

"Think of that, my dear fellow," continued Sanguinetti. "Picture Antichrist at the Vatican, consummating the ruin of religion by his implacable pride, his iron will, his gloomy passion for nihilism; for there can be no doubt of it, he is the Beast of Death announced by the prophecies, the Beast who will expose one and all to the danger of being swallowed up with him in his furious rush into abysmal darkness. I know him; he only dreams of obstinacy and destruction, he will seize the pillars of the temple and shake them in order that he may sink beneath the ruins, he and the whole Catholic world! In less than six months he will be driven from Rome, at strife with all the nations, execrated by Italy, and roaming the world like the phantom of the last pope!"

It was with a low growl, suggestive of a stifled oath, that Santobono responded to this frightful prediction. But the train had now reached the station, and among the few passengers who had alighted, Pierre could distinguish a little Abbé, who was walking so fast that his cassock flapped against his hips. It was Abbé Eufemio, the Cardinal's secretary, and when he had perceived his Eminence on the balcony he lost all self-respect, and broke into a run, in order that he might the sooner ascend the sloping street. "Ah! here's Eufemio," exclaimed the Cardinal, quivering with anxiety. "We shall know now, we shall know now."

The secretary had plunged into the doorway below,

and he climbed the stairs with such rapidity that almost immediately afterwards Pierre saw him rush breathlessly across the waiting-room, and vanish into the Cardinal's sanctum. Sanguinetti had quitted the balcony to meet his messenger, but soon afterwards he returned to it asking questions, venting exclamations, raising, in fact, quite a tumult over the news which he had received. "And so it's really true, the night was a bad one. His Holiness scarcely slept! Colic, you were told? But nothing could be worse at his age; it might carry him off in a couple of hours. And the doctors, what do they say?"

The answer did not reach Pierre, but he understood its purport as the Cardinal in his naturally loud voice resumed: "Oh! the doctors never know. Besides, when they refuse to speak death is never far off. *Dio!* what a misfortune if the catastrophe cannot be deferred for a few days!"

Then he became silent, and Pierre realised that his eyes were once more travelling towards Rome, gazing with ambitious anguish at the dome of St. Peter's, that little, sparkling speck above the vast, ruddy plain. What a commotion, what agitation if the Pope were dead! And he wished that it had merely been necessary for him to stretch forth his arm in order to take and hold the Eternal City, the Holy City, which, yonder on the horizon, occupied no more space than a heap of gravel cast there by a child's spade. And he was already dreaming of the coming Conclave, when the canopy of each other cardinal would fall, and his own, motionless and sovereign, would crown him with purple.

"But you are right, my friend!" he suddenly ex-

claimed, addressing Santobono, "one must act, the salvation of the Church is at stake. And, besides, it is impossible that Heaven should not be with us, since our sole desire is its triumph. If necessary, at the supreme moment, Heaven will know how to crush Antichrist."

Then, for the first time, Pierre distinctly heard the voice of Santobono, who, gruffly, with a sort of savage decision, responded: "Oh! if Heaven is tardy it shall be helped."

That was all; the young man heard nothing further save a confused murmur of voices. The speakers quitted the balcony, and his spell of waiting began afresh in the sunlit *salon* so peaceful and delightful in its brightness. But all at once the door of his Eminence's private room was thrown wide open and a servant ushered him in; and he was surprised to find the Cardinal alone, for he had not witnessed the departure of the two priests, who had gone off by another door. The Cardinal, with his highly coloured face, big nose, thick lips, square-set, vigorous figure, which still looked young despite his sixty years, was standing near a window in the bright golden light. He had put on the paternal smile with which he greeted even the humblest from motives of good policy, and as soon as Pierre had knelt and kissed his ring, he motioned him to a chair. "Sit down, dear son, sit down. You have come of course about that unfortunate affair of your book. I am very pleased indeed to be able to speak with you about it."

He himself then took a chair in front of that window overlooking Rome whence he seemed unable to

drag himself. And the young priest, whilst apologising for coming to disturb his rest, perceived that he scarcely listened, for his eyes again sought the prey which he so ardently coveted. Yet the semblance of good-natured attention was perfect, and Pierre marvelled at the force of will which this man must possess to appear so calm, so interested in the affairs of others, when such a tempest was raging in him.

"Your Eminence will, I hope, kindly forgive me," continued the young priest.

"But you have done right to come, since I am kept here by my failing health," said the Cardinal. "Besides, I am somewhat better, and it is only natural that you should wish to give me some explanations and defend your work and enlighten my judgment. In fact, I was astonished at not yet having seen you, for I know that your faith in your cause is great and that you spare no steps to convert your judges. So speak, my dear son, I am listening and shall be pleased indeed if I can absolve you."

Pierre was caught by these kind words, and a hope returned to him, that of winning the support of the all-powerful Prefect of the Index. He already regarded this ex-nuncio—who at Brussels and Vienna had acquired the worldly art of sending people away satisfied with indefinite promises though he meant to grant them nothing—as a man of rare intelligence and exquisite cordiality. And so once more he regained the fervour of his apostolate to express his views respecting the future Rome, the Rome he dreamt of, which was destined yet again to become the mistress of the world if she would return to the

Christianity of Jesus, to an ardent love for the weak and the humble.

Sanguinetti smiled, wagged his head, and raised exclamations of rapture: "Very good, very good indeed, perfect! Oh! I agree with you, dear son. One cannot put things better. It is quite evident; all good minds must agree with you." And then, said he, the poetic side deeply touched him. Like Leo XIII—and doubtless in a spirit of rivalry—he courted the reputation of being a very distinguished Latinist, and professed a special and boundless affection for Virgil. "I know, I know," he exclaimed, "I remember your page on the return of spring, which consoles the poor whom winter has frozen. Oh! I read it three times over! And are you aware that your writing is full of Latin turns of style. I noticed more than fifty expressions which could be found in the 'Bucolics.' Your book is a charm, a perfect charm!"

As he was no fool, and realised that the little priest before him was a man of high intelligence, he ended by interesting himself, not in Pierre personally, but in the profit which he might possibly derive from him. Amidst his feverish intrigues, he unceasingly sought to utilise all the qualities possessed by those whom God sent to him that might in any way be conducive to his own triumph. So, for a moment, he turned away from Rome and looked his companion in the face, listening to him and asking himself in what way he might employ him—either at once in the crisis through which he was passing, or later on when he should be pope. But the young priest again made the

mistake of attacking the temporal power, and of employing that unfortunate expression, "a new religion." Thereupon the Cardinal stopped him with a gesture, still smiling, still retaining all his amiability, although the resolution which he had long since formed became from that moment definitive. "You are certainly in the right on many points, my dear son," he said, "and I often share your views—share them completely. But come, you are doubtless not aware that I am the protector of Lourdes here at Rome. And so, after the page which you have written about the Grotto, how can I possibly pronounce in your favour and against the Fathers?"

Pierre was utterly overcome by this announcement, for he was indeed unaware of the Cardinal's position with respect to Lourdes, nobody having taken the precaution to warn him. However, each of the Catholic enterprises distributed throughout the world has a protector at Rome, a cardinal who is designated by the Pope to represent it and, if need be, to defend it.

"Those good Fathers!" Sanguinetti continued in a gentle voice, "you have caused them great grief, and really our hands are tied, we cannot add to their sorrow. If you only knew what a number of masses they send us! I know more than one of our poor priests who would die of hunger if it were not for them."

Pierre could only bow beneath the blow. Once more he found himself in presence of the pecuniary question, the necessity in which the Holy See is placed to secure the revenue it requires one year with another. And thus the Pope was ever in servitude,

for if the loss of Rome had freed him of the cares of state, his enforced gratitude for the alms he received still riveted him to earth. So great, indeed, were the requirements, that money was the ruler, the sovereign power, before which all bowed at the Court of Rome.

And now Sanguinetti rose to dismiss his visitor. "You must not despair, dear son," he said effusively. "I have only my own vote, you know, and I promise you that I will take into account the excellent explanations which you have just given me. And who can tell? If God be with you, He will save you even in spite of all!" This speech formed part of the Cardinal's usual tactics; for one of his principles was never to drive people to extremes by sending them away hopeless. What good, indeed, would it do to tell this one that the condemnation of his book was a foregone conclusion, and that his only prudent course would be to disavow it? Only a savage like Boccanera breathed anger upon fiery souls and plunged them into rebellion. "You must hope, hope!" repeated Sanguinetti with a smile, as if implying a multitude of fortunate things which he could not plainly express.

Thereupon Pierre, who was deeply touched, felt born anew. He even forgot the conversation he had surprised, the Cardinal's keen ambition and covert rage with his redoubtable rival. Besides, might not intelligence take the place of heart among the powerful? If this man should some day become pope, and had understood him, might he not prove the pope who was awaited, the pope who would accept the task of reorganising the Church of the United States of Europe, and making it the spiritual sovereign of the

world? So he thanked him with emotion, bowed, and left him to his dream, standing before that widely open window whence Rome appeared to him, glittering like a jewel, even indeed as the tiara of gold and gems, in the splendour of the autumn sun.

It was nearly one o'clock when Pierre and Count Prada were at last able to sit down to *déjeuner* in the little restaurant where they had agreed to meet. They had both been delayed by their affairs. However, the Count, having settled some worrying matters to his own advantage, was very lively, whilst the priest on his side was again hopeful, and yielded to the delightful charm of that last fine day. And so the meal proved a very pleasant one in the large, bright room, which, as usual at that season of the year, was quite deserted. Pink and blue predominated in the decoration, but Cupids fluttered on the ceiling, and landscapes, vaguely recalling the Roman castles, adorned the walls. The things they ate were fresh, and they drank the wine of Frascati, to which the soil imparts a kind of burnt flavour as if the old volcanoes of the region had left some little of their fire behind.

For a long while the conversation ranged over those wild and graceful Alban hills, which, fortunately for the pleasure of the eye, overlook the flat Roman Campagna. Pierre, who had made the customary carriage excursion from Frascati to Nemi, still felt its charm and spoke of it in glowing language. First came the lovely road from Frascati to Albano, ascending and descending hillsides planted with reeds, vines, and olive-trees, amongst which one obtained frequent glimpses of the Campagna's wavy immensity. On the right-

hand the village of Rocca di Papa arose in amphitheatrical fashion, showing whitely on a knoll below Monte Cavo, which was crowned by lofty and ancient trees. And from this point of the road, on looking back towards Frascati, one saw high up, on the verge of a pine wood the ruins of Tusculum, large ruddy ruins, baked by centuries of sunshine, and whence the boundless panorama must have been superb. Next one passed through Marino, with its sloping streets, its large cathedral, and its black decaying palace belonging to the Colonnas. Then, beyond a wood of ilex-trees, the lake of Albano was skirted with scenery which has no parallel in the world. In front, beyond the clear mirror of motionless water, were the ruins of Alba Longa; on the left rose Monte Cavo with Rocca di Papa and Palazzuolo; whilst on the right Castel Gandolfo overlooked the lake as from the summit of a cliff. Down below in the extinct crater, as in the depths of a gigantic cup of verdure, the lake slept heavy and lifeless: a sheet of molten metal, which the sun on one side streaked with gold, whilst the other was black with shade. And the road then ascended all the way to Castel Gandolfo, which was perched on its rock, like a white bird betwixt the lake and the sea. Ever refreshed by breezes, even in the most burning hours of summer, the little place was once famous for its papal villa, where Pius IX loved to spend hours of indolence, and whither Leo XIII has never come. And next the road dipped down, and the ilex-trees appeared again, ilex-trees famous for their size, a double row of monsters with twisted limbs, two and three hundred years old. Then one at

last reached Albano, a small town less modernised and less cleansed than Frascati, a patch of the old land which has retained some of its ancient wildness; and afterwards there was Ariccia with the Palazzo Chigi, and hills covered with forests and viaducts spanning ravines which overflowed with foliage; and there was yet Genzano, and yet Nemi, growing still wilder and more remote, lost in the midst of rocks and trees.

Ah! how ineffaceable was the recollection which Pierre had retained of Nemi, Nemi on the shore of its lake, Nemi so delicious and fascinating from afar, conjuring up all the ancient legends of fairy towns springing from amidst the greenery of mysterious waters, but so repulsively filthy when one at last reaches it, crumbling on all sides but yet dominated by the Orsini tower, as by the evil genius of the middle ages, which there seems to perpetuate the ferocious habits, the violent passions, the knife thrusts of the past! Thence came that Santobono whose brother had killed, and who himself, with his eyes of crime glittering like live embers, seemed to be consumed by a murderous flame. And the lake, that lake round like an extinguished moon fallen into the depths of a former crater, a deeper and less open cup than that of the lake of Albano, a cup rimmed with trees of wondrous vigour and density! Pines, elms, and willows descend to the very margin, with a green mass of tangled branches which weigh each other down. This formidable fecundity springs from the vapour which constantly arises from the water under the parching action of the sun, whose rays accumulate in this hollow

till it becomes like a furnace. There is a warm, heavy dampness, the paths of the adjacent gardens grow green with moss, and in the morning dense mists often fill the large cup with white vapour, as with the steaming milk of some sorceress of malevolent craft. And Pierre well remembered how uncomfortable he had felt before that lake where ancient atrocities, a mysterious religion with abominable rites, seemed to slumber amidst the superb scenery. He had seen it at the approach of evening, looking, in the shade of its forest girdle, like a plate of dull metal, black and silver, motionless by reason of its weight. And that water, clear and yet so deep, that water deserted, without a bark upon its surface, that water august, lifeless, and sepulchral, had left him a feeling of inexpressible sadness, of mortal melancholy, the hopelessness of great solitary passion, earth and water alike swollen by the mute spasms of germs, troublous in their fecundity. Ah! those black and plunging banks, and that black mournful lake prone at the bottom! ¹

Count Prada began to laugh when Pierre told him of these impressions. "Yes, yes," said he, "it's true, Nemi isn't always gay. In dull weather I have seen the lake looking like lead, and even the full sunshine

¹ Some literary interest attaches to M. Zola's account of Nemi, whose praises have been sung by a hundred poets. It will be observed that he makes no mention of Egeria. The religion distinguished by abominable practices to which he alludes, may perhaps be the worship of the Egyptian Diana, who had a famous temple near Nemi, which was excavated by Lord Savile some ten years ago, when all the smaller objects discovered were presented to the town of Nottingham. At this temple, according to some classical writers, the chief priest was required to murder his predecessor, and there were other abominable usages. — *Trans.*

scarcely animates it. For my part, I know I should die of ennui if I had to live face to face with that bare water. But it is admired by poets and romantic women, those who adore great tragedies of passion."

Then, as he and Pierre rose from the table to go and take coffee on the terrace of the restaurant, the conversation changed: "Do you mean to attend Prince Buongiovanni's reception this evening?" the Count inquired. "It will be a curious sight, especially for a foreigner, and I advise you not to miss it."

"Yes, I have an invitation," Pierre replied. "A friend of mine, Monsieur Narcisse Habert, an *attaché* at our embassy, procured it for me, and I am going with him."

That evening, indeed, there was to be a *fête* at the Palazzo Buongiovanni on the Corso, one of the few *galas* that take place in Rome each winter. People said that this one would surpass all others in magnificence, for it was to be given in honour of the betrothal of little Princess Celia. The Prince, her father, after boxing her ears, it was rumoured, and narrowly escaping an attack of apoplexy as the result of a frightful fit of anger, had, all at once, yielded to her quiet, gentle stubbornness, and consented to her marriage with Lieutenant Attilio, the son of Minister Sacco. And all the drawing-rooms of Rome, those of the white world quite as much as those of the black, were thoroughly upset by the tidings.

Count Prada made merry over the affair. "Ah! you'll see a fine sight!" he exclaimed. "Personally, I'm delighted with it all for the sake of my good cousin Attilio, who is really a very nice and worthy

fellow. And nothing in the world would keep me from going to see my dear uncle Sacco make his entry into the ancient *salons* of the Buongiovanni. It will be something extraordinary and superb. He has at last become Minister of Agriculture, you know. My father, who always takes things so seriously, told me this morning that the affair so worried him he hadn't closed his eyes all night."

The Count paused, but almost immediately added: "I say, it is half-past two and you won't have a train before five o'clock. Do you know what you ought to do? Why, drive back to Rome with me in my carriage."

"No, no," rejoined Pierre, "I'm deeply obliged to you but I'm to dine with my friend Narcisse this evening, and I mustn't be late."

"But you won't be late—on the contrary! We shall start at three and reach Rome before five o'clock. There can't be a more pleasant promenade when the light falls; and, come, I promise you a splendid sunset."

He was so pressing that the young priest had to accept, quite subjugated by so much amiability and good humour. They spent another half-hour very pleasantly in chatting about Rome, Italy, and France. Then, for a moment, they went up into Frascati where the Count wished to say a few words to a contractor, and just as three o'clock was striking they started off, seated side by side on the soft cushions and gently rocked by the motion of the victoria as the two horses broke into a light trot. As Prada had predicted, that return to Rome across the bare Campagna under the

vast limpid heavens at the close of such a mild autumn day proved most delightful. First of all, however, the victoria had to descend the slopes of Frascati between vineyards and olive-trees. The paved road snaked, and was but little frequented; they merely saw a few peasants in old felt hats, a white mule, and a cart drawn by a donkey, for it is only upon Sundays that the *osterie* or wine-shops are filled and that artisans in easy circumstances come to eat a dish of kid at the surrounding *bastides*. However, at one turn of the road they passed a monumental fountain. Then a flock of sheep momentarily barred the way before defiling past. And beyond the gentle undulations of the ruddy Campagna Rome appeared amidst the violet vapours of evening, sinking by degrees as the carriage itself descended to a lower and lower level. There came a moment when the city was a mere thin grey streak, speckled whitely here and there by a few sunlit house-fronts. And then it seemed to plunge below the ground — to be submerged by the swell of the far-spreading fields.

The victoria was now rolling over the plain, leaving the Alban hills behind, whilst before it and on either hand came the expanse of meadows and stubbles. And then it was that the Count, after leaning forward, exclaimed: "Just look ahead, yonder, there's our man of this morning, Santobono in person — what a strapping fellow he is, and how fast he walks! My horses can scarcely overtake him."

Pierre in his turn leant forward and likewise perceived the priest of St. Mary in the Fields, looking tall and knotty, fashioned as it were with a bill-hook.

Robed in a long black cassock, he showed like a vigorous splotch of ink amidst the bright sunshine streaming around him ; and he was walking on at such a fast, stern, regular pace that he suggested Destiny on the march. Something, which could not be well distinguished, was hanging from his right arm.

When the carriage had at last overtaken him Prada told the coachman to slacken speed, and then entered into conversation.

"Good-day, Abbé ; you are well, I hope ? " he asked.

"Very well, Signor Conte, I thank you."

"And where are you going so bravely ? "

"Signor Conte, I am going to Rome."

"What ! to Rome, at this late hour ? "

"Oh ! I shall be there nearly as soon as yourself. The distance doesn't frighten me, and money's quickly earned by walking."

Scarcely turning his head to reply, stepping out beside the wheels, Santobono did not miss a stride. And Prada, diverted by the meeting, whispered to Pierre : "Wait a bit, he'll amuse us." Then he added aloud : "Since you are going to Rome, Abbé, you had better get in here ; there's room for you."

Santobono required no pressing, but at once accepted the offer. "Willingly ; a thousand thanks," he said. "It's still better to save one's shoe leather."

Then he got in and installed himself on the bracket-seat, declining with abrupt humility the place which Pierre politely offered him beside the Count. The young priest and the latter now saw that the object he was carrying was a little basket of fresh figs, nicely arranged and covered with leaves.

The horses set off again at a faster trot, and the carriage rolled on and on over the superb, flat plain. "So you are going to Rome?" the Count resumed in order to make Santobono talk.

"Yes," the other replied, "I am taking his Eminence Cardinal Boccanera these few figs, the last of the season: a little present which I had promised him." He had placed the basket on his knees and was holding it between his big knotty hands as if it were something rare and fragile.

"Ah! some of the famous figs of your garden," said Prada. "It's quite true, they are like honey. But why don't you rid yourself of them. You surely don't mean to keep them on your knees all the way to Rome. Give them to me, I'll put them in the hood."

However, Santobono became quite agitated, and vigorously declined the offer. "No, no, a thousand thanks! They don't embarrass me in the least; they are very well here; and in this way I shall be sure that no accident will befall them."

His passion for the fruit he grew quite amused Prada, who nudged Pierre, and then inquired: "Is the Cardinal fond of your figs?"

"Oh! his Eminence condescends to adore them. In former years, when he spent the summer at the villa, he would never touch the figs from other trees. And so, you see, knowing his tastes, it costs me very little to gratify him."

Whilst making this reply Santobono had shot such a keen glance in the direction of Pierre that the Count felt it necessary to introduce them to one another. This he did saying: "As it happens, Monsieur l'Abbé

Froment is stopping at the Palazzo Boccanera ; he has been there for three months or so."

"Yes, I'm aware of it," Santobono quietly replied ; "I found Monsieur l'Abbé with his Eminence one day when I took some figs to the Palazzo. Those were less ripe, but these are perfect." So speaking he gave the little basket a complacent glance, and seemed to press it yet more closely between his huge and hairy fingers.

Then came a spell of silence, whilst on either hand the Campagna spread out as far as the eye could reach. All houses had long since disappeared ; there was not a wall, not a tree, nothing but the undulating expanse whose sparse, short herbage was, with the approach of winter, beginning to turn green once more. A tower, a half-fallen ruin which came into sight on the left, rising in solitude into the limpid sky above the flat, boundless line of the horizon, suddenly assumed extraordinary importance. Then, on the right, the distant silhouettes of cattle and horses were seen in a large enclosure with wooden rails. Urged on by the goad, oxen, still yoked, were slowly coming back from ploughing ; whilst a farmer, cantering beside the ploughed land on a little sorrel nag, gave a final look round for the night. Now and again the road became peopled. A *biroccino*, an extremely light vehicle with two huge wheels and a small seat perched upon the springs, whisked by like a gust of wind. From time to time also the victoria passed a *carrotino*, one of the low carts in which peasants, sheltered by a kind of bright-hued tent, bring the wine, vegetables, and fruit of the castle-lands to Rome. The shrill tinkling of

horses' bells was heard afar off as the animals followed the well-known road of their own accord, their peasant drivers usually being sound asleep. Women with bare, black hair, scarlet neckerchiefs, and skirts caught up, were seen going home in groups of three and four. And then the road again emptied, and the solitude became more and more complete, without a wayfarer or an animal appearing for miles and miles, whilst yonder, at the far end of the lifeless sea, so grandiose and mournful in its monotony, the sun continued to descend from the infinite vault of heaven.

"And the Pope, Abbé, is he dead?" Prada suddenly inquired.

Santobono did not even start. "I trust," he replied in all simplicity, "that his Holiness still has many long years to live for the triumph of the Church."

"So you had good news this morning when you called on your bishop, Cardinal Sanguinetti?"

This time the priest was unable to restrain a slight start. Had he been seen, then? In his haste he had failed to notice the two men following the road behind him. However, he at once regained self-possession, and replied: "Oh! one can never tell exactly whether news is good or bad. It seems that his Holiness passed a somewhat painful night, but I devoutly hope that the next will be a better one." Then he seemed to meditate for a moment, and added: "Moreover, if God should have deemed it time to call his Holiness to Himself, He would not leave His flock without a shepherd. He would have already chosen and designated the Sovereign Pontiff of to-morrow."

This superb answer increased Prada's gaiety. "You

are really extraordinary, Abbé," he said. "So you think that popes are solely created by the grace of the Divinity! The pope of to-morrow is chosen up in heaven, eh, and simply waits? Well, I fancied that men had something to do with the matter. But perhaps you already know which cardinal it is that the divine favour has thus elected in advance?"

Then, like the unbeliever he was, he went on with his facile jests, which left the priest unruffled. In fact, the latter also ended by laughing when the Count, after alluding to the gambling passion which at each fresh Conclave sets wellnigh the whole population of Rome betting for or against this or that candidate, told him that he might easily make his fortune if he were in the divine secret. Next the talk turned on the three white cassocks of different sizes which are always kept in readiness in a cupboard at the Vatican. Which of them would be required on this occasion? — the short one, the long one, or the one of medium size? Each time that the reigning pope falls somewhat seriously ill there is in this wise an extraordinary outburst of emotion, a keen awakening of all ambitions and intrigues, to such a point that not merely in the black world, but throughout the city, people have no other subject of curiosity, conversation, and occupation than that of discussing the relative claims of the cardinals and predicting which of them will be elected.

"Come, come," Prada resumed, "since you know the truth, I'm determined that you shall tell me. Will it be Cardinal Moretta?"

Santobono, in spite of his evident desire to remain

dignified and disinterested, like a good, pious priest, was gradually growing impassioned, yielding to the hidden fire which consumed him. And this interrogatory finished him off; he could no longer restrain himself, but replied: "Moretta! What an idea! Why, he is sold to all Europe!"

"Well, will it be Cardinal Bartolini?"

"Oh! you can't think that. Bartolini has used himself up in striving for everything and getting nothing."

"Will it be Cardinal Dozio, then?"

"Dozio, Dozio! Why, if Dozio were to win one might altogether despair of our Holy Church, for no man can have a baser mind than he!"

Prada raised his hands, as if he had exhausted the serious candidates. In order to increase the priest's exasperation he maliciously refrained from naming Cardinal Sanguinetti, who was certainly Santobono's nominee. All at once, however, he pretended to make a good guess, and gaily exclaimed: "Ah! I have it; I know your man — Cardinal Boccanera!"

The blow struck Santobono full in the heart, wounding him both in his rancour and his patriotic faith. His terrible mouth was already opening, and he was about to shout "No! no!" with all his strength, but he managed to restrain the cry, compelled as he was to silence by the present on his knees — that little basket of figs which he pressed so convulsively with both hands; and the effort which he was obliged to make left him quivering to such a point that he had to wait some time before he could reply in a calm voice: "His most reverend Eminence

Cardinal Boccanera is a saintly man, well worthy of the throne, and my only fear is that, with his hatred of new Italy, he might bring us warfare."

Prada, however, desired to enlarge the wound. "At all events," said he, "you accept him and love him too much not to rejoice over his chances of success. And I really think that we have arrived at the truth, for everybody is convinced that the Conclave's choice cannot fall elsewhere. Come, come; Boccanera is a very tall man, so it's the long white cassock which will be required."

"The long cassock, the long cassock," growled Santobono, despite himself; "that's all very well, but —"

Then he stopped short, and, again overcoming his passion, left his sentence unfinished. Pierre, listening in silence, marvelled at the man's self-restraint, for he remembered the conversation which he had overheard at Cardinal Sanguinetti's. Those figs were evidently a mere pretext for gaining admission to the Boccanera mansion, where some friend — Abbé Paparelli, no doubt — could alone supply certain positive information which was needed. But how great was the command which the hot-blooded priest exercised over himself amidst the riotous impulses of his soul!

On either side of the road the Campagna still and ever spread its expanse of verdure, and Prada, who had become grave and dreamy, gazed before him without seeing anything. At last, however, he gave expression to his thoughts. "You know, Abbé, what will be said if the Pope should die this time. That sudden illness, those colics, those refusals to make

any information public, mean nothing good — Yes, yes, poison, just as for the others!”

Pierre gave a start of stupefaction. The Pope poisoned! “What! Poison? Again?” he exclaimed as he gazed at his companions with dilated eyes. Poison at the end of the nineteenth century, as in the days of the Borgias, as on the stage in a romanticist melodrama! To him the idea appeared both monstrous and ridiculous.

Santobono, whose features had become motionless and impenetrable, made no reply. But Prada nodded, and the conversation was henceforth confined to him and the young priest. “Why, yes, poison,” he replied. “The fear of it has remained very great in Rome. Whenever a death seems inexplicable, either by reason of its suddenness or the tragic circumstances which attend it, the unanimous thought is poison. And remark this: in no city, I believe, are sudden deaths so frequent. The causes I don’t exactly know, but some doctors put everything down to the fevers. Among the people, however, the one thought is poison, poison with all its legends, poison which kills like lightning and leaves no trace, the famous recipe bequeathed from age to age, through the emperors and the popes, down to these present times of middle-class democracy.”

As he spoke he ended by smiling, for he was inclined to be somewhat sceptical on the point, despite the covert terror with which he was inspired by racial and educational causes. However, he quoted instances. The Roman matrons had rid themselves of their husbands and lovers by employ-

ing the venom of red toads. Locusta, in a more practical spirit, sought poison in plants, one of which, probably aconite, she was wont to boil. Then, long afterwards, came the age of the Borgias, and subsequently, at Naples, La Toffana sold a famous water, doubtless some preparation of arsenic, in phials decorated with a representation of St. Nicholas of Bari. There were also extraordinary stories of pins, a prick from which killed one like lightning, of cups of wine poisoned by the infusion of rose petals, of woodcocks cut in half with prepared knives, which poisoned but one-half of the bird, so that he who partook of that half was killed. "I myself, in my younger days," continued Prada, "had a friend whose bride fell dead in church during the marriage service through simply inhaling a bouquet of flowers. And so isn't it possible that the famous recipe may really have been handed down, and have remained known to a few adepts?"

"But chemistry has made too much progress," Pierre replied. "If mysterious poisons were believed in by the ancients and remained undetected in their time it was because there were no means of analysis. But the drug of the Borgias would now lead the simpleton who might employ it straight to the Assizes. Such stories are mere nonsense, and at the present day people scarcely tolerate them in newspaper serials and shockers."

"Perhaps so," resumed the Count with his uneasy smile. "You are right, no doubt — only go and tell that to your host, for instance, Cardinal Boccanera, who last summer held in his arms an old and deeply

loved friend, Monsignor Gallo, who died after a seizure of a couple of hours."

"But apoplexy may kill one in two hours, and aneurism only takes two minutes."

"True, but ask the Cardinal what he thought of his friend's prolonged shudders, the leaden hue which overcame his face, the sinking of his eyes, and the expression of terror which made him quite unrecognisable. The Cardinal is convinced that Monsignor Gallo was poisoned, because he was his dearest confidant, the counsellor to whom he always listened, and whose wise advice was a guarantee of success."

Pierre's bewilderment was increasing, and, irritated by the impassibility of Santobono, he addressed him direct. "It's idiotic, it's awful! Does your reverence also believe in these frightful stories?"

But the priest of Frascati gave no sign. His thick, passionate lips remained closed while his black glowing eyes never ceased to gaze at Prada. The latter, moreover, was quoting other instances. There was the case of Monsignor Nazzarelli, who had been found in bed, shrunken and calcine like carbon. And there was that of Monsignor Brando, struck down in his sacerdotal vestments at St. Peter's itself, in the very sacristy, during vespers!

"Ah! *Mon Dieu!*" sighed Pierre, "you will tell me so much that I myself shall end by trembling, and sha'n't dare to eat anything but boiled eggs as long as I stay in this terrible Rome of yours."

For a moment this whimsical reply enlivened both the Count and Pierre. But it was quite true that their conversation showed Rome under a terrible

aspect, for it conjured up the Eternal City of Crime, the city of poison and the knife, where for more than two thousand years, ever since the raising of the first bit of wall, the lust of power, the frantic hunger for possession and enjoyment, had armed men's hands, ensanguined the pavements, and cast victims into the river and the ground. Assassinations and poisonings under the emperors, poisonings and assassinations under the popes, ever did the same torrent of abominations strew that tragic soil with death amidst the sovereign glory of the sun.

"All the same," said the Count, "those who take precautions are perhaps not ill advised. It is said that more than one cardinal shudders and mistrusts people. One whom I know will never eat anything that has not been bought and prepared by his own cook. And as for the Pope, if he is anxious —"

Pierre again raised a cry of stupefaction. "What, the Pope himself! The Pope afraid of being poisoned!"

"Well, my dear Abbé, people commonly assert it. There are certainly days when he considers himself more menaced than anybody else. And are you not aware of the old Roman view that a pope ought never to live till too great an age, and that when he is so obstinate as not to die at the right time he ought to be assisted? As soon as a pope begins to fall into second childhood, and by reason of his senility becomes a source of embarrassment, and possibly even danger, to the Church, his right place is heaven. Moreover, matters are managed in a discreet manner; a slight cold becomes a decent pretext to prevent him from tarrying any longer on the throne of St. Peter."

Prada then gave some curious details. One prelate, it was said, wishing to dispel his Holiness's fears, had devised an elaborate precautionary system which, among other things, was to comprise a little pad-locked vehicle, in which the food destined for the frugal pontifical table was to be securely placed before leaving the kitchen, so that it might not be tampered with on its way to the Pope's apartments. However, this project had not yet been carried into effect.

"After all," the Count concluded with a laugh, "every pope has to die some day, especially when his death is needful for the welfare of the Church. Isn't that so, Abbé?"

Santobono, whom he addressed, had a moment previously lowered his eyes as if to contemplate the little basket of figs which he held on his lap with as much care as if it had been the Blessed Sacrament. On being questioned in such a direct, sharp fashion he could not do otherwise than look up. However, he did not depart from his prolonged silence, but limited his answer to a slow nod.

"And it is God alone, and not poison, who causes one to die. Is that not so, Abbé?" repeated Prada. "It is said that those were the last words of poor Monsignor Gallo before he expired in the arms of his friend Cardinal Boccanera."

For the second time Santobono nodded without speaking. And then silence fell, all three sinking into a dreamy mood.

Meantime, without a pause, the carriage rolled on across the immensity of the Campagna. The road,

straight as an arrow, seemed to extend into the infinite. As the sun descended towards the horizon the play of light and shade became more marked on the broad undulations of the ground which stretched away, alternately of a pinky green and a violet grey, till they reached the distant fringe of the sky. At the roadside on either hand there were still and ever tall withered thistles and giant fennel with yellow umbels. Then, after a time, came a team of four oxen, that had been kept ploughing until late, and stood forth black and huge in the pale atmosphere and mournful solitude. Farther on some flocks of sheep, whence the breeze wafted a tallowy odour, set patches of brown amidst the herbage, which once more was becoming verdant; whilst at intervals a dog was heard to bark, his voice the only distinct sound amidst the low quivering of that silent desert where the sovereign peacefulness of death seemed to reign. But all at once a light melody arose and some larks flew up, one of them soaring into the limpid golden heavens. And ahead, at the far extremity of the pure sky, Rome, with her towers and domes, grew larger and larger, like a city of white marble springing from a mirage amidst the greenery of some enchanted garden.

"Matteo!" Prada called to his coachman, "pull up at the Osteria Romana." And to his companions he added: "Pray excuse me, but I want to see if I can get some new-laid eggs for my father. He is so fond of them."

A few minutes afterwards the carriage stopped. At the very edge of the road stood a primitive sort of

inn, bearing the proud and sonorous name of "Antica Osteria Romana." It had now become a mere house of call for carters and chance sportsmen, who ventured to drink a flagon of white wine whilst eating an omelet and a slice of ham. Occasionally, on Sundays, some of the humble classes would walk over from Rome and make merry there; but the week days often went by without a soul entering the place, such was its isolation amidst the bare Campagna.

The Count was already springing from the carriage. "I shall only be a minute," said he as he turned away.

The *osteria* was a long, low pile with a ground floor and one upper storey, the last being reached by an outdoor stairway built of large blocks of stone which had been scorched by the hot suns. The entire place, indeed, was corroded, tinged with the hue of old gold. On the ground floor one found a common room, a cart-house, and a stable with adjoining sheds. At one side, near a cluster of parasol pines — the only trees that could grow in that ungrateful soil — there was an arbour of reeds where five or six rough wooden tables were set out. And, as a background to this sorry, mournful nook of life, there arose a fragment of an ancient aqueduct whose arches, half fallen and opening on to space, alone interrupted the flat line of the horizon.

All at once, however, the Count retraced his steps, and, addressing Santobono, exclaimed: "I say, Abbé, you'll surely accept a glass of white wine. I know that you are a bit of a vine grower, and they have a little white wine here which you ought to make acquaintance with."

Santobono again required no pressing, but quietly alighted. "Oh! I know it," said he; "it's a wine from Marino; it's grown in a lighter soil than ours at Frascati."

Then, as he would not relax his hold on his basket of figs, but even now carried it along with him, the Count lost patience. "Come, you don't want that basket," said he; "leave it in the carriage."

The priest gave no reply, but walked ahead, whilst Pierre also made up his mind to descend from the carriage in order to see what a suburban *osteria* was like. Prada was known at this place, and an old woman, tall, withered, but looking quite queenly in her wretched garments, had at once presented herself. On the last occasion when the Count had called she had managed to find half a dozen eggs. This time she said she would go to see, but could promise nothing, for the hens laid here and there all over the place, and she could never tell what eggs there might be.

"All right!" Prada answered, "go and look; and meantime we will have a *caraffa* of white wine."

The three men entered the common room, which was already quite dark. Although the hot weather was now over, one heard the buzzing of innumerable flies immediately one reached the threshold, and a pungent odour of acidulous wine and rancid oil caught one at the throat. As soon as their eyes became accustomed to the dimness they were able to distinguish the spacious, blackened, malodorous chamber, whose only furniture consisted of some roughly made tables and benches. It seemed to be

quite empty, so complete was the silence, apart from the buzz of the flies. However, two men were seated there, two wayfarers who remained mute and motionless before their untouched, brimming glasses. Moreover, on a low chair near the door, in the little light which penetrated from without, a thin, sallow girl, the daughter of the house, sat idle, trembling with fever, her hands close pressed between her knees.

Realising that Pierre felt uncomfortable there, the Count proposed that they should drink their wine outside. "We shall be better out of doors," said he, "it's so very mild this evening."

Accordingly, whilst the mother looked for the eggs, and the father mended a wheel in an adjacent shed, the daughter was obliged to get up shivering to carry the flagon of wine and the three glasses to the arbour, where she placed them on one of the tables. And, having pocketed the price of the wine — threepence — in silence, she went back to her seat with a sullen look, as if annoyed at having been compelled to make such a long journey. Meanwhile the three men had sat down, and Prada gaily filled each of the glasses, although Pierre declared that he was quite unable to drink wine between his meals. "Pooh, pooh," said the Count, "you can always clink glasses with us. And now, Abbé, isn't this little wine droll? Come, here's to the Pope's better health, since he's unwell!"

Santobono at one gulp emptied his glass and clacked his tongue. With gentle, paternal care he had deposited his basket on the ground beside him: and, taking off his hat, he drew a long breath. The evening was really delightful. A superb sky of a soft golden hue

stretched over that endless sea of the Campagna which was soon to fall asleep with sovereign quiescence. And the light breeze which went by amidst the deep silence brought with it an exquisite odour of wild herbs and flowers.

"How pleasant it is!" muttered Pierre, affected by the surrounding charm. "And what a desert for eternal rest, forgetfulness of all the world!"

Prada, who had emptied the flagon by filling Santobono's glass a second time, made no reply; he was silently amusing himself with an occurrence which at first he was the only one to observe. However, with a merry expression of complicity, he gave the young priest a wink, and then they both watched the dramatic incidents of the affair. Some scraggy fowls were wandering round them searching the yellow turf for grasshoppers; and one of these birds, a little shiny black hen with an impudent manner, had caught sight of the basket of figs and was boldly approaching it. When she got near, however, she took fright, and retreated somewhat, with neck stiffened and head turned, so as to cast suspicious glances at the basket with her round sparkling eye. But at last covetousness gained the victory, for she could see one of the figs between the leaves, and so she slowly advanced, lifting her feet very high at each step; and, all at once, stretching out her neck, she gave the fig a formidable peck, which ripped it open and made the juice exude.

Prada, who felt as happy as a child, was then able to give vent to the laughter which he had scarcely been able to restrain: "Look out, Abbé," he called, "mind your figs!"

At that very moment Santobono was finishing his second glass of wine with his head thrown back and his eyes blissfully raised to heaven. He gave a start, looked round, and on seeing the hen at once understood the position. And then came a terrible outburst of anger, with sweeping gestures and terrible invectives. But the hen, who was again pecking, would not be denied; she dug her beak into the fig and carried it off, flapping her wings, so quick and so comical that Prada, and Pierre as well, laughed till tears came into their eyes, their merriment increasing at sight of the impotent fury of Santobono, who, for a moment, pursued the thief, threatening her with his fist.

"Ah!" said the Count, "that's what comes of not leaving the basket in the carriage. If I hadn't warned you the hen would have eaten all the figs."

The priest did not reply, but, growling out vague imprecations, placed the basket on the table, where he raised the leaves and artistically rearranged the fruit so as to fill up the void. Then, the harm having been repaired as far as was possible, he at last calmed down.

It was now time for them to resume their journey, for the sun was sinking towards the horizon, and night would soon fall. Thus the Count ended by getting impatient. "Well, and those eggs?" he called.

Then, as the woman did not return, he went to seek her. He entered the stable, and afterwards the cart-house, but she was neither here nor there. Next he went towards the rear of the *osteria* in order to look in the sheds. But all at once an unexpected

spectacle made him stop short. The little black hen was lying on the ground, dead, killed as by lightning. She showed no sign of hurt; there was nothing but a little streamlet of violet blood still trickling from her beak. Prada was at first merely astonished. He stooped and touched the hen. She was still warm and soft like a rag. Doubtless some apoplectic stroke had killed her. But immediately afterwards he became fearfully pale; the truth appeared to him, and turned him as cold as ice. In a moment he conjured up everything: Leo XIII attacked by illness, Santobono hurrying to Cardinal Sanguinetti for tidings, and then starting for Rome to present a basket of figs to Cardinal Boccanera. And Prada also remembered the conversation in the carriage: the possibility of the Pope's demise, the candidates for the tiara, the legendary stories of poison which still fostered terror in and around the Vatican; and he once more saw the priest, with his little basket on his knees, lavishing paternal attention on it, and he saw the little black hen pecking at the fruit and fleeing with a fig on her beak. And now that little black hen lay there, suddenly struck down, dead!

His conviction was immediate and absolute. But he did not have time to decide what course he should take, for a voice behind him exclaimed: "Why, it's the little hen; what's the matter with her?"

The voice was that of Pierre, who, letting Santobono climb into the carriage alone, had in his turn come round to the rear of the house in order to obtain a better view of the ruined aqueduct among the parasol pines.

Prada, who shuddered as if he himself were the culprit, answered him with a lie, a lie which he did not premeditate, but to which he was impelled by a sort of instinct. "But she's dead," he said. . . . "Just fancy, there was a fight. At the moment when I got here that other hen, which you see yonder, sprang upon this one to get the fig, which she was still holding, and with a thrust of the beak split her head open. . . . The blood's flowing, as you can see yourself."

Why did he say these things? He himself was astonished at them whilst he went on inventing them. Was it then that he wished to remain master of the situation, keep the abominable secret entirely to himself, in order that he might afterwards act in accordance with his own desires? Certainly his feelings partook of shame and embarrassment in presence of that foreigner, whilst his personal inclination for violence set some admiration amidst the revolt of his conscience, and a covert desire arose within him to examine the matter from the standpoint of his interests before he came to a decision. But, on the other hand, he claimed to be a man of integrity, and would assuredly not allow people to be poisoned.

Pierre, who was compassionately inclined towards all creation, looked at the hen with the emotion which he always felt at the sudden severance of life. However, he at once accepted Prada's story. "Ah! those fowls!" said he. "They treat one another with an idiotic ferocity which even men can scarcely equal. I kept fowls at home at one time, and one of the hens no sooner hurt her leg than all the others, on seeing

the blood oozing, would flock round and peck at the limb till they stripped it to the bone."

Prada, however, did not listen, but at once went off; and it so happened that the woman was, on her side, looking for him in order to hand him four eggs which, after a deal of searching, she had discovered in odd corners about the house. The Count made haste to pay for them, and called to Pierre, who was lingering behind: "We must look sharp! We sha'n't reach Rome now until it is quite dark."

They found Santobono quietly waiting in the carriage, where he had again installed himself on the bracket with his spine resting against the box-seat and his long legs drawn back under him, and he again had the little basket of figs on his knees, and clasped it with his big knotty hands as though it were something fragile and rare which the slightest jolting might damage. His cassock showed like a huge blot, and in his coarse ashen face, that of a peasant yet near to the wild soil and but slightly polished by a few years of theological studies, his eyes alone seemed to live, glowing with the dark flame of a devouring passion. On seeing him seated there in such composure Prada could not restrain a slight shudder. Then, as soon as the victoria was again rolling along the road, he exclaimed: "Well, Abbé, that glass of wine will guarantee us against the malaria. The Pope would soon be cured if he could imitate our example."

Santobono's only reply was a growl. He was in no mood for conversation, but wrapped himself in perfect silence, as in the night which was slowly falling. And Prada in his turn ceased to speak, and,

with his eyes still fixed upon the other, reflected on the course that he should follow.

The road turned, and then the carriage rolled on and on over another interminable straight highway with white paving, whose brilliancy made the road look like a ribbon of snow stretching across the Campagna, where delicate shadows were slowly falling. Gloom gathered in the hollows of the broad undulations whence a tide of violet hue seemed to spread over the short herbage until all mingled and the expanse became an indistinct swell of neutral hue from one to the other horizon. And the solitude was now yet more complete; a last indolent cart had gone by and a last tinkling of horses' bells had subsided in the distance. There was no longer a passer-by, no longer a beast of the fields to be seen, colour and sound died away, all forms of life sank into slumber, into the serene stillness of nihility. Some fragments of an aqueduct were still to be seen at intervals on the right hand, where they looked like portions of gigantic millepeds severed by the scythe of time; next, on the left, came another tower, whose dark and ruined pile barred the sky as with a huge black stake; and then the remains of another aqueduct spanned the road, assuming yet greater dimensions against the sunset glow. Ah! that unique hour, the hour of twilight in the Campagna, when all is blotted out and simplified, the hour of bare immensity, of the infinite in its simplest expression! There is nothing, nothing all around you, but the flat line of the horizon with the one splotch of an isolated tower, and yet that nothing is instinct with sovereign majesty.

However, on the left, towards the sea, the sun was setting, descending in the limpid sky like a globe of fire of blinding redness. It slowly plunged beneath the horizon, and the only sign of cloud was some fiery vapour, as if indeed the distant sea had seethed at contact with that royal and flaming visit. And directly the sun had disappeared the heavens above it purpled and became a lake of blood, whilst the Campagna turned to grey. At the far end of the fading plain there remained only that purple lake whose brasier slowly died out behind the black arches of the aqueduct, while in the opposite direction the scattered arches remained bright and rosy against a pewter-like sky. Then the fiery vapour was dissipated, and the sunset ended by fading away. One by one the stars came out in the pacified vault, now of an ashen blue, while the lights of Rome, still far away on the verge of the horizon, scintillated like the lamps of light-houses.

And Prada, amidst the dreamy silence of his companions and the infinite melancholy of the evening and the inexpressible distress which even he experienced, continued to ask himself what course he should adopt. Again and again he mentally repeated that he could not allow people to be poisoned. The figs were certainly intended for Cardinal Boccanera, and on the whole it mattered little to him whether there were a cardinal the more or the fewer in the world. Moreover, it had always seemed to him best to let Destiny follow its course; and, infidel that he was, he saw no harm in one priest devouring another. Again, it might be dangerous for him to intervene in that

abominable affair, to mix himself up in the base, fathomless intrigues of the black world. But on the other hand the Cardinal was not the only person who lived in the Boccanera mansion, and might not the figs go to others, might they not be eaten by people to whom no harm was intended? This idea of a treacherous chance haunted him, and in spite of every effort the figures of Benedetta and Dario rose up before him, returned and imposed themselves on him though he again and again sought to banish them from his mind. What if Benedetta, what if Dario should partake of that fruit? For Benedetta he felt no fear, for he knew that she and her aunt ate their meals by themselves, and that their *cuisine* and the Cardinal's had nothing in common. But Dario sat at his uncle's table every day, and for a moment Prada pictured the young Prince suddenly seized with a spasm, then falling, like poor Monsignor Gallo, into the Cardinal's arms with livid face and receding eyes, and dying within two hours.

But no, no! That would be frightful, he could not suffer such an abomination. And thereupon he made up his mind. He would wait till the night had completely gathered round and would then simply take the basket from Santobono's lap and fling it into some dark hollow without saying a word. The priest would understand him. The other one, the young Frenchman, would perhaps not even notice the incident. Besides, that mattered little, for he would not even attempt to explain his action. And he felt quite calm again when the idea occurred to him to throw the basket away while the carriage passed through the Porta

Furba, a couple of miles or so before reaching Rome. That would suit him exactly; in the darkness of the gateway nothing whatever would be seen.

"We stopped too long at that *osteria*," he suddenly exclaimed aloud, turning towards Pierre. "We sha'n't reach Rome much before six o'clock. Still you will have time to dress and join your friend." And then without awaiting the young man's reply he said to Santobono: "Your figs will arrive very late, Abbé."

"Oh!" answered the priest, "his Eminence receives until eight o'clock. And, besides, the figs are not for this evening. People don't eat figs in the evening. They will be for to-morrow morning." And thereupon he again relapsed into silence.

"For to-morrow morning — yes, yes, no doubt," repeated Prada. "And the Cardinal will be able to thoroughly regale himself if nobody helps him to eat the fruit."

Thereupon Pierre, without pausing to reflect, exclaimed: "He will no doubt eat it by himself, for his nephew, Prince Dario, must have started to-day for Naples on a little convalescence trip to rid himself of the effects of the accident which laid him up during the last month." Then, having got so far, the young priest remembered to whom he was speaking, and abruptly stopped short.

The Count noticed his embarrassment. "Oh! speak on, my dear Monsieur Froment," said he, "you don't offend me. It's an old affair now. So that young man has left, you say?"

"Yes, unless he has postponed his departure. However, I don't expect to find him at the palazzo when I get there."

For a moment the only sound was that of the continuous rumble of the wheels. Prada again felt worried, a prey to the discomfort of uncertainty. Why should he mix himself up in the affair if Dario were really absent? All the ideas which came to him tired his brain, and he ended by thinking aloud: "If he has gone away it must be for propriety's sake, so as to avoid attending the Buongiovanni reception, for the Congregation of the Council met this morning to give its decision in the suit which the Countess has brought against me. Yes, I shall know by and by whether our marriage is to be dissolved."

It was in a somewhat hoarse voice that he spoke these words, and one could realise that the old wound was again bleeding within him. Although Lisbeth had borne him a son, the charge levelled against him in his wife's petition for divorce still filled him with blind fury each time that he thought of it. And all at once he shuddered violently, as if an icy blast had darted through his frame. Then, turning the conversation, he added: "It's not at all warm this evening. This is the dangerous hour of the Roman climate, the twilight hour when it's easy to catch a terrible fever if one isn't prudent. Here, pull the rug over your legs, wrap it round you as carefully as you can."

Then, as they drew near the Porta Furba, silence again fell, more profound, like the slumber which was invincibly spreading over the Campagna, now steeped in night. And at last, in the bright starlight, appeared the gate, an arch of the Acqua Felice, under which the road passed. From a distance, this fragment seemed

to bar the way with its mass of ancient half-fallen walls. But afterwards the gigantic arch where all was black opened like a gaping porch. And the carriage passed under it in darkness whilst the wheels rumbled with increased sonority.

When the victoria emerged on the other side, Santobono still had the little basket of figs upon his knees and Prada looked at it, quite overcome, asking himself what sudden paralysis of the hands had prevented him from seizing it and throwing it into the darkness. Such had still been his intention but a few seconds before they passed under the arch. He had even given the basket a final glance in order that he might the better realise what movements he should make. What had taken place within him then? At present he was yielding to increasing irresolution, henceforth incapable of decisive action, feeling a need of delay in order that he might, before everything else, fully satisfy himself as to what was likely to happen. And as Dario had doubtless gone away and the figs would certainly not be eaten until the following morning, what reason was there for him to hurry? He would know that evening if the Congregation of the Council had annulled his marriage, he would know how far the so-called "Justice of God" was venal and mendacious! Certainly he would suffer nobody to be poisoned, not even Cardinal Boccanera, though the latter's life was of little account to him personally. But had not that little basket, ever since leaving Frascati, been like Destiny on the march? And was it not enjoyment, the enjoyment of omnipotence, to be able to say to himself that he was the master who could stay that bas-

ket's course, or allow it to go onward and accomplish its deadly purpose? Moreover, he yielded to the dimmest of mental struggles, ceasing to reason, unable to raise his hand, and yet convinced that he would drop a warning note into the letter-box at the palazzo before he went to bed, though at the same time he felt happy in the thought that if his interest directed otherwise he would not do so.

And the remainder of the journey was accomplished in silent weariness, amidst the shiver of evening which seemed to have chilled all three men. In vain did the Count endeavour to escape from the battle of his thoughts, by reverting to the Buongiovanni reception, and giving particulars of the splendours which would be witnessed at it: his words fell sparsely in an embarrassed and absent-minded way. Then he sought to inspirit Pierre by speaking to him of Cardinal Sanguinetti's amiable manner and fair words, but although the young priest was returning home well pleased with his journey, in the idea that with a little help he might yet triumph, he scarcely answered the Count, so wrapt he was in his reverie. And Santobono, on his side, neither spoke nor moved. Black like the night itself, he seemed to have vanished. However, the lights of Rome were increasing in number, and houses again appeared on either hand, at first at long intervals, and then in close succession. They were suburban houses, and there were yet more fields of reeds, quickset hedges, olive-trees overtopping long walls, and big gateways with vase-surmounted pillars; but at last came the city with its rows of small grey houses, its petty shops and its

dingy taverns, whence at times came shouts and rumours of battle.

Prada insisted on setting his companions down in the Via Giulia, at fifty paces from the palazzo. "It doesn't inconvenience me at all," said he to Pierre. "Besides, with the little time you have before you, it would never do for you to go on foot."

The Via Giulia was already steeped in slumber, and wore a melancholy aspect of abandonment in the dreary light of the gas lamps standing on either hand. And as soon as Santobono had alighted from the carriage, he took himself off without waiting for Pierre, who, moreover, always went in by the little door in the side lane."

"Good-bye, Abbé," exclaimed Prada.

"Good-bye, Count, a thousand thanks," was Santobono's response.

Then the two others stood watching him as he went towards the Boccanera mansion, whose old, monumental entrance, full of gloom, was still wide open. For a moment they saw his tall, rugged figure erect against that gloom. Then in he plunged, he and his little basket, bearing Destiny.

XII

It was ten o'clock when Pierre and Narcisse, after dining at the Caffè di Roma, where they had long lingered chatting, at last walked down the Corso towards the Palazzo Buongiovanni. They had the greatest difficulty to reach its entrance, for carriages were coming up in serried files, and the inquisitive crowd of on-lookers, who pressed even into the roadway, in spite of the injunctions of the police, was growing so compact that even the horses could no longer approach. The ten lofty windows on the first floor of the long monumental façade shone with an intense white radiance, the radiance of electric lamps, which illumined the street like sunshine, spreading over the equipages aground in that human sea, whose billows of eager, excited faces rolled to and fro amidst an extraordinary tumult.

And in all this there was not merely the usual curiosity to see uniforms go by and ladies in rich attire alight from their carriages, for Pierre soon gathered from what he heard that the crowd had come to witness the arrival of the King and Queen, who had promised to appear at the ball given by Prince Buongiovanni, in celebration of the betrothal of his daughter Celia to Lieutenant Attilio Sacco, the son of one of his Majesty's ministers. Moreover, people were enrapt-

ured with this marriage, the happy ending of a love story which had impassioned the whole city: to begin with, love at first sight, with the suddenness of a lightning-flash, and then stubborn fidelity triumphing over all obstacles, amidst romantic circumstances whose story sped from lip to lip, moistening every eye and stirring every heart.

It was this story that Narcisse had related at dessert to Pierre, who already knew some portion of it. People asserted that if the Prince had ended by yielding after a final terrible scene, it was only from fear of seeing Celia elope from the palace with her lover. She did not threaten to do so, but, amidst her virginal calmness, there was so much contempt for everything foreign to her love, that her father felt her to be capable of acting with the greatest folly in all ingenuousness. Only indifference was manifested by the Prince's wife, a phlegmatic and still beautiful Englishwoman, who considered that she had done quite enough for the household by bringing her husband a dowry of five millions, and bearing him five children. The Prince, anxious and weak despite his violence, in which one found a trace of the old Roman blood, already spoilt by mixture with that of a foreign race, was nowadays ever influenced in his actions by the fear that his house and fortune — which hitherto had remained intact amidst the accumulated ruins of the *patriziato* — might suddenly collapse. And in finally yielding to Celia, he must have been guided by the idea of rallying to the new *régime* through his daughter, so as to have one foot firmly set at the Quirinal, without withdrawing the other from the Vatican.

It was galling, no doubt; his pride must have bled at the idea of allying his name with that of such low folks as the Saccos. But then Sacco was a minister, and had sped so quickly from success to success that it seemed likely he would rise yet higher, and, after the portfolio of Agriculture, secure that of Finances, which he had long coveted. And an alliance with Sacco meant the certain favour of the King, an assured retreat in that direction should the papacy some day collapse. Then, too, the Prince had made inquiries respecting the son, and was somewhat disarmed by the good looks, bravery, and rectitude of young Attilio, who represented the future, and possibly the glorious Italy of to-morrow. He was a soldier, and could be helped forward to the highest rank. And people spitefully added that the last reason which had influenced the Prince, who was very avaricious, and greatly worried by the thought that his fortune must be divided among his five children,¹ was that an opportunity presented itself for him to bestow a ridiculously small dowry on Celia. However, having consented to the marriage, he resolved to give a splendid *fête*, such as was now seldom witnessed in Rome, throwing his doors open to all the rival sections of society, inviting the sovereigns, and setting the palazzo ablaze as in the grand days of old. In doing this he would necessarily have to expend some of the money to which he clung, but a boastful spirit incited

¹ The Italian succession law is similar to the French. Children cannot be disinherited. All property is divided among them, and thus the piling up of large hereditary fortunes is prevented.—*Trans.*

him to show the world that he at any rate had not been vanquished by the financial crisis, and that the Buongiovannis had nothing to hide and nothing to blush for. To tell the truth, some people asserted that this bravado had not originated with himself, but had been instilled into him without his knowledge by the quiet and innocent Celia, who wished to exhibit her happiness to all applauding Rome.

"Dear me!" said Narcisse, whom the throng prevented from advancing. "We shall never get in. Why, they seem to have invited the whole city." And then, as Pierre seemed surprised to see a prelate drive up in his carriage, the *attaché* added: "Oh! you will elbow more than one of them upstairs. The cardinals won't like to come on account of the presence of the King and Queen, but the prelates are sure to be here. This, you know, is a neutral drawing-room where the black and the white worlds can fraternise. And then too, there are so few *fêtes* that people rush on them."

He went on to explain that there were two grand balls at Court every winter, but that it was only under exceptional circumstances that the *patriziato* gave similar *galas*. Two or three of the black *salons* were opened once in a way towards the close of the Carnival, but little dances among intimates replaced the pompous entertainments of former times. Some princesses moreover merely had their day. And as for the few white *salons* that existed, these likewise retained the same character of intimacy, more or less mixed, for no lady had yet become the undisputed queen of the new society.

"Well, here we are at last," resumed Narcisse as they eventually climbed the stairs.

"Let us keep together," Pierre somewhat anxiously replied. "My only acquaintance is with the *fiancée*, and I want you to introduce me."

However, a considerable effort was needed even to climb the monumental staircase, so great was the crush of arriving guests. Never, in the old days of wax candles and oil lamps, had this staircase offered such a blaze of light. Electric lamps, burning in clusters in superb bronze candelabra on the landings, steeped everything in a white radiance. The cold stucco of the walls was hidden by a series of lofty tapestries depicting the story of Cupid and Psyche, marvels which had remained in the family since the days of the Renaissance. And a thick carpet covered the worn marble steps, whilst clumps of evergreens and tall spreading palms decorated every corner. An affluence of new blood warmed the antique mansion that evening; there was a resurrection of life, so to say, as the women surged up the staircase, smiling and perfumed, bare-shouldered, and sparkling with diamonds.

At the entrance of the first reception-room Pierre at once perceived Prince and Princess Buongiovanni, standing side by side and receiving their guests. The Prince, a tall, slim man with fair complexion and hair turning grey, had the pale northern eyes of his American mother in an energetic face such as became a former captain of the popes. The Princess, with small, delicate, and rounded features, looked barely thirty, though she had really passed her fortieth year. And still

pretty, displaying a smiling serenity which nothing could disconcert, she purely and simply basked in self-adoration. Her gown was of pink satin, and a marvellous parure of large rubies set flamelets about her dainty neck and in her fine, fair hair. Of her five children, her son, the eldest, was travelling, and three of the girls, mere children, were still at school, so that only Celia was present, Celia in a modest gown of white muslin, fair like her mother, quite bewitching with her large innocent eyes and her candid lips, and retaining to the very end of her love story the semblance of a closed lily of impenetrable, virginal mysteriousness. The Saccos had but just arrived, and Attilio, in his simple lieutenant's uniform, had remained near his betrothed, so naïvely and openly delighted with his great happiness that his handsome face, with its caressing mouth and brave eyes, was quite resplendent with youth and strength. Standing there, near one another, in the triumph of their passion they appeared like life's very joy and health, like the personification of hope in the morrow's promises; and the entering guests who saw them could not refrain from smiling and feeling moved, momentarily forgetting their loquacious and malicious curiosity to give their hearts to those chosen ones of love who looked so handsome and so enraptured.

Narcisse stepped forward in order to present Pierre, but Celia anticipated him. Going to meet the young priest she led him to her father and mother, saying: "Monsieur l'Abbé Pierre Froment, a friend of my dear Benedetta." Ceremonious salutations followed. Then the young girl, whose graciousness greatly

touched Pierre, said to him: "Benedetta is coming with her aunt and Dario. She must be very happy this evening! And you will also see how beautiful she will be."

Pierre and Narcisse next began to congratulate her, but they could not remain there, the throng was ever jostling them; and the Prince and Princess, quite lost in the crush, had barely time to answer the many salutations with amiable, continuous nods. And Celia, after conducting the two friends to Attilio, was obliged to return to her parents so as to take her place beside them as the little queen of the *fête*.

Narcisse was already slightly acquainted with Attilio, and so fresh congratulations ensued. Then the two friends manœuvred to find a spot where they might momentarily tarry and contemplate the spectacle which this first *salon* presented. It was a vast hall, hung with green velvet brodered with golden flowers, and contained a very remarkable collection of weapons and armour, breast-plates, battle-axes, and swords, almost all of which had belonged to the Buongioannis of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. And amidst those stern implements of war there was a lovely sedan-chair of the last century, gilded and decorated with delicate paintings. It was in this chair that the Prince's great-grandmother, the celebrated Bettina, whose beauty was historical, had usually been carried to mass. On the walls, moreover, there were numerous historical paintings: battles, peace congresses, and royal receptions in which the Buongioannis had taken part, without counting the many family portraits, tall and proud figures of sea-captains, com-

manders in the field, great dignitaries of the Church, prelates and cardinals, amongst whom, in the place of honour, appeared the family pope, the white-robed Buongiovanni whose accession to the pontifical throne had enriched a long line of descendants. And it was among those armours, near that coquettish sedan, and below those antique portraits, that the Saccos, husband and wife, had in their turn just halted, at a few steps from the master and mistress of the house, in order to secure their share of congratulations and bows.

"Look over there!" Narcisse whispered to Pierre, "those are the Saccos in front of us, that dark little fellow and the lady in mauve silk."

Pierre promptly recognised the bright face and pleasant smile of Stefana, whom he had already met at old Orlando's. But he was more interested in her husband, a dark dry man, with big eyes, sallow complexion, prominent chin, and vulturine nose. Like some gay Neapolitan "Pulcinello," he was dancing, shouting, and displaying such infectious good humour that it spread to all around him. He possessed a wonderful gift of speech, with a voice that was unrivalled as an instrument of fascination and conquest; and on seeing how easily he ingratiated himself with the people in that drawing-room, one could understand his lightning-like successes in the political world. He had manœvered with rare skill in the matter of his son's marriage, affecting such exaggerated delicacy of feeling as to set himself against the lovers, and declare that he would never consent to their union, as he had no desire to be accused of stealing a dowry

and a title. As a matter of fact, he had only yielded after the Buongioannis had given their consent, and even then he had desired to take the opinion of old Orlando, whose lofty integrity was proverbial. However, he knew right well that he would secure the old hero's approval in this particular affair, for Orlando made no secret of his opinion that the Buongioannis ought to be glad to admit his grand-nephew into their family, as that handsome young fellow, with brave and healthy heart, would help to regenerate their impoverished blood. And throughout the whole affair, Sacco had shrewdly availed himself of Orlando's famous name, for ever talking of the relationship between them, and displaying filial veneration for this glorious founder of the country, as if indeed he had no suspicion that the latter despised and execrated him and mourned his accession to power in the conviction that he would lead Italy to shame and ruin.

"Ah!" resumed Narcisse addressing Pierre, "he's one of those supple, practical men who care nothing for a smack in the face. It seems that unscrupulous individuals like himself become necessary when states get into trouble and have to pass through political, financial, and moral crises. It is said that Sacco with his imperturbable assurance and ingenious and resourceful mind has quite won the King's favour. Just look at him! Why, with that crowd of courtiers round him, one might think him the master of this palace!"

And indeed the guests, after passing the Prince and Princess with a bow, at once congregated around Sacco, for he represented power, emoluments, pensions, and crosses; and if folks still smiled at seeing

his dark, turbulent, and scraggy figure amidst that framework of family portraits which proclaimed the mighty ancestry of the Buongiovannis, they none the less worshipped him as the personification of the new power, the democratic force which was confusedly rising even from the old Roman soil where the *patriziato* lay in ruins.

"What a crowd!" muttered Pierre. "Who are all these people?"

"Oh!" replied Narcisse, "it is a regular mixture. These people belong neither to the black nor the white world; they form a grey world as it were. The evolution was certain; a man like Cardinal Boccanera may retain an uncompromising attitude, but a whole city, a nation can't. The Pope alone will always say no and remain immutable. But everything around him progresses and undergoes transformation, so that in spite of all resistance, Rome will become Italian in a few years' time. Even now, whenever a prince has two sons only one of them remains on the side of the Vatican, the other goes over to the Quirinal. People must live, you see; and the great families threatened with annihilation have not sufficient heroism to carry obstinacy to the point of suicide. And I have already told you that we are here on neutral ground, for Prince Buongiovanni was one of the first to realise the necessity of conciliation. He feels that his fortune is perishing, he does not care to risk it either in industry or in speculation, and already sees it portioned out among his five children, by whose descendants it will be yet further divided; and this is why he prudently makes advances to the King without, however, break-

ing with the Pope. In this *salon*, therefore, you see a perfect picture of the *débâcle*, the confusion which reigns in the Prince's ideas and opinions." Narcisse paused, and then began to name some of the persons who were coming in. "There's a general," said he, "who has become very popular since his last campaign in Africa. There will be a great many military men here this evening, for all Attilio's superiors have been invited, so as to give the young man an *entourage* of glory. Ah! and there's the German ambassador. I fancy that nearly all the Corps Diplomatique will come on account of their Majesties' presence. But, by way of contrast, just look at that stout fellow yonder. He's a very influential deputy, a *parvenu* of the new middle class. Thirty years ago he was merely one of Prince Albertini's farmers, one of those *mercanti di campagna* who go about the environs of Rome in stout boots and a soft felt hat. And now look at that prelate coming in —"

"Oh! I know him," Pierre interrupted. "He's Monsignor Fornaro."

"Exactly, Monsignor Fornaro, a personage of some importance. You told me, I remember, that he is the reporter of the Congregation in that affair of your book. A most delightful man! Did you see how he bowed to the Princess? And what a noble and graceful bearing he has in his little mantle of violet silk!"

Then Narcisse went on enumerating the princes and princesses, the dukes and duchesses, the politicians and functionaries, the diplomatists and ministers, and the officers and well-to-do middle-class people, who of themselves made up a most wonderful medley of

guests, to say nothing of the representatives of the various foreign colonies, English people, Americans, Germans, Spaniards, and Russians, in a word, all ancient Europe, and both Americas. And afterwards the young man reverted to the Saccos, to the little Signora Sacco in particular, in order to tell Pierre of the heroic efforts which she had made to open a *salon* for the purpose of assisting her husband's ambition. Gentle and modest as she seemed, she was also very shrewd, endowed with genuine qualities, Piedmontese patience and strength of resistance, orderly habits and thriftiness. And thus it was she who re-established the equilibrium in household affairs which her husband by his exuberance so often disturbed. He was indeed greatly indebted to her, though nobody suspected it. At the same time, however, she had so far failed in her attempts to establish a white *salon* which should take the lead in influencing opinion. Only the people of her own set visited her, not a single prince ever came, and her Monday dances were the same as in a score of other middle-class homes, having no brilliancy and no importance. In fact, the real white *salon*, which should guide men and things and sway all Rome was still in dreamland.

"Just notice her keen smile as she examines everything here," resumed Narcisse. "She's teaching herself and forming plans, I'm sure of it. Now that she is about to be connected with a princely family she probably hopes to receive some of the best society."

Large as was the room, the crowd in it had by this time grown so dense that the two friends were pressed back to a wall, and felt almost stifled. The *attaché*

therefore decided to lead the priest elsewhere, and as they walked along he gave him some particulars concerning the palace, which was one of the most sumptuous in Rome, and renowned for the magnificence of its reception-rooms. Dancing took place in the picture gallery, a superb apartment more than sixty feet long, with eight windows overlooking the Corso; while the buffet was installed in the Hall of the Antiques, a marble hall, which among other precious things contained a statue of Venus, rivalling the one at the Capitol. Then there was a suite of marvellous *salons*, still resplendent with ancient luxury, hung with the rarest stuffs, and retaining some unique specimens of old-time furniture, on which covetous antiquaries kept their eyes fixed, whilst waiting and hoping for the inevitable future ruin. And one of these apartments, the little Saloon of the Mirrors, was particularly famous. Of circular shape and Louis XV style, it was surrounded by mirrors in *rococo* frames, extremely rich, and most exquisitely carved.

"You will see all that by and by," continued Narcisse. "At present we had better go in here if we want to breathe a little. It is here that the arm-chairs from the adjacent gallery have been brought for the accommodation of the ladies who desire to sit down and be seen and admired."

The apartment they entered was a spacious one, draped with the most superb Genoese velvet, that antique *jardinière* velvet with pale satin ground, and flowers once of dazzling brightness, whose greens and blues and reds had now become exquisitely soft, with the subdued, faded tones of old floral love-tokens. On

the pier tables and in the cabinets all around were some of the most precious curios in the palace, ivory caskets, gilt and painted wood carvings, pieces of antique plate — briefly, a collection of marvels. And several ladies, fleeing the crush, had already taken refuge on the numerous seats, clustering in little groups, and laughing and chatting with the few gentlemen who had discovered this retreat of grace and *galanterie*. In the bright glow of the lamps nothing could be more delightful than the sight of all those bare, sheeny shoulders, and those supple necks, above whose napes were coiled tresses of fair or raven hair. Bare arms emerged like living flowers of flesh from amidst the mingling lace and silk of soft-hued bodices. The fans played slowly, as if to heighten the fires of the precious stones, and at each beat wafted around an *odore di femina* blended with a predominating perfume of violets.

“Hallo!” exclaimed Narcisse, “there’s our good friend Monsignor Nani bowing to the Austrian ambassador.”

As soon as Nani perceived the young priest and his companion he came towards them, and the trio then withdrew into the embrasure of a window in order that they might chat for a moment at their ease. The prelate was smiling like one enchanted with the beauty of the *fête*, but at the same time he retained all the serenity of innocence, as if he had not even noticed the exhibition of bare shoulders by which he was surrounded. “Ah, my dear son!” he said to Pierre, “I am very pleased to see you! Well, and what do you think of our Rome when she makes up her mind to give *fêtes*?”

"Why, it is superb, Monseigneur."

Then, in an emotional manner, Nani spoke of Celia's lofty piety; and, in order to give the Vatican the credit of this sumptuous *gala*, affected to regard the Prince and Princess as staunch adherents of the Church, as if he were altogether unaware that the King and Queen were presently coming. And afterwards he abruptly exclaimed: "I have been thinking of you all day, my dear son. Yes, I heard that you had gone to see his Eminence Cardinal Sanguinetti. Well, and how did he receive you?"

"Oh! in a most paternal manner," Pierre replied. "At first he made me understand the embarrassment in which he was placed by his position as protector of Lourdes; but just as I was going off he showed himself charming, and promised me his help with a delicacy which deeply touched me."

"Did he indeed, my dear son? But it doesn't surprise me, his Eminence is so good-hearted!"

"And I must add, Monseigneur, that I came back with a light and hopeful heart. It now seems to me as if my suit were half gained."

"Naturally, I understand it," replied Nani, who was still smiling with that keen, intelligent smile of his, sharpened by a touch of almost imperceptible irony. And after a short pause he added in a very simple way: "The misfortune is that on the day before yesterday your book was condemned by the Congregation of the Index, which was convoked by its Secretary expressly for that purpose. And the judgment will be laid before his Holiness, for him to sign it, on the day after to-morrow."

Pierre looked at the prelate in bewilderment. Had the old mansion fallen on his head he would not have felt more overcome. What! was it all over? His journey to Rome, the experiment he had come to attempt there, had resulted in that defeat, of which he was thus suddenly apprised amidst that betrothal *fête*. And he had not even been able to defend himself, he had sacrificed his time without finding any one to whom he might speak, before whom he might plead his cause! Anger was rising within him, and he could not prevent himself from muttering bitterly: "Ah! how I have been duped! And that Cardinal who said to me only this morning: 'If God be with you he will save you in spite of everything.' Yes, yes, I now understand him; he was juggling with words, he only desired a disaster in order that submission might lead me to Heaven! Submit, indeed, ah! I cannot, I cannot yet! My heart is too full of indignation and grief."

Nani examined and studied him with curiosity. "But my dear son," he said, "nothing is final so long as the Holy Father has not signed the judgment. You have all to-morrow and even the morning of the day after before you. A miracle is always possible." Then, lowering his voice and drawing Pierre on one side whilst Narcisse in an æsthetical spirit examined the ladies, he added: "Listen, I have a communication to make to you in great secrecy. Come and join me in the little Saloon of the Mirrors by and by, during the Cotillon. We shall be able to talk there at our ease."

Pierre nodded, and thereupon the prelate discreetly

withdrew and disappeared in the crowd. However, the young man's ears were buzzing; he could no longer hope; what indeed could he accomplish in one day since he had lost three months without even being able to secure an audience with the Pope? And his bewilderment increased as he suddenly heard Narcisse speaking to him of art. "It's astonishing how the feminine figure has deteriorated in these dreadful democratic days. It's all fat and horribly common. Not one of those women yonder shows the Florentine contour, with small bosom and slender, elegant neck. Ah! that one yonder isn't so bad perhaps, the fair one with her hair coiled up, whom Monsignor Fornaro has just approached."

For a few minutes indeed Monsignor Fornaro had been fluttering from beauty to beauty, with an amiable air of conquest. He looked superb that evening with his lofty decorative figure, blooming cheeks, and victorious affability. No unpleasant scandal was associated with his name; he was simply regarded as a prelate of gallant ways who took pleasure in the society of ladies. And he paused and chatted, and leant over their bare shoulders with laughing eyes and humid lips as if experiencing a sort of devout rapture. However, on perceiving Narcisse whom he occasionally met, he at once came forward and the *attaché* had to bow to him. "You have been in good health I hope, Monseigneur, since I had the honour of seeing you at the embassy."

"Oh! yes, I am very well, very well indeed. What a delightful *fête*, is it not?"

Pierre also had bowed. This was the man whose

report had brought about the condemnation of his book; and it was with resentment that he recalled his caressing air and charming greeting, instinct with such lying promise. However, the prelate, who was very shrewd, must have guessed that the young priest was already acquainted with the decision of the Congregation, and have thought it more dignified to abstain from open recognition; for on his side he merely nodded and smiled at him. "What a number of people!" he went on, "and how many charming persons there are! It will soon be impossible for one to move in this room."

All the seats in fact were now occupied by ladies, and what with the strong perfume of violets and the exhalations of warm necks and shoulders the atmosphere was becoming most oppressive. The fans flapped more briskly, and clear laughter rang out amidst a growing hubbub of conversation in which the same words constantly recurred. Some news, doubtless, had just arrived, some rumour was being whispered from group to group, throwing them all into feverish excitement. As it happened, Monsignor Fornaro, who was always well informed, desired to be the proclaimer of this news, which nobody as yet had ventured to announce aloud.

"Do you know what is exciting them all?" he inquired.

"Is it the Holy Father's illness?" asked Pierre in his anxiety. "Is he worse this evening?"

The prelate looked at him in astonishment, and then somewhat impatiently replied: "Oh, no, no. His Holiness is much better, thank Heaven. A person

belonging to the Vatican was telling me just now that he was able to get up this afternoon and receive his intimates as usual."

"All the same, people have been alarmed," interrupted Narcisse. "I must confess that we did not feel easy at the embassy, for a Conclave at the present time would be a great worry for France. She would exercise no influence at it. It is a great mistake on the part of our Republican Government to treat the Holy See as of no importance! However, can one ever tell whether the Pope is ill or not? I know for a certainty that he was nearly carried off last winter when nobody breathed a word about any illness, whereas on the last occasion when the newspapers killed him and talked about a dreadful attack of bronchitis, I myself saw him quite strong and in the best of spirits! His reported illnesses are mere matters of policy, I fancy."¹

With a hasty gesture, however, Monsignor Fornaro brushed this importunate subject aside. "No, no," said he, "people are tranquillised and no longer talk of it. What excites all those ladies is that the Congregation of the Council to-day voted the dissolution of the Prada marriage by a great majority."

Again did Pierre feel moved. However, not having had time to see any members of the Boccanera family on his return from Frascati he feared that the news might be false and said so. Thereupon the prelate gave his word of honour that things were as he

¹ There is much truth in this; but the reader must not imagine that the Pope is never ill. At his great age, indispositions are only natural. — *Trans.*

stated. "The news is certain," he declared. "I had it from a member of the Congregation." And then, all at once, he apologised and hurried off: "Excuse me but I see a lady whom I had not yet caught sight of, and desire to pay my respects to her."

He at once hastened to the lady in question, and, being unable to sit down, inclined his lofty figure as if to envelop her with his gallant courtesy; whilst she, young, fresh, and bare-shouldered, laughed with a pearly laugh as his cape of violet silk lightly brushed her sheeny skin.

"You know that person, don't you?" Narcisse inquired of Pierre. "No! Really? Why, that is Count Prada's *inamorata*, the charming Lisbeth Kauffmann, by whom he has just had a son. It's her first appearance in society since that event. She's a German, you know, and lost her husband here. She paints a little; in fact, rather nicely. A great deal is forgiven to the ladies of the foreign colony, and this one is particularly popular on account of the very affable manner in which she receives people at her little palazzo in the Via Principe Amedeo. As you may imagine, the news of the dissolution of that marriage must amuse her!"

She looked really exquisite, that Lisbeth, very fair, rosy, and gay, with satiny skin, soft blue eyes, and lips wreathed in an amiable smile, which was renowned for its grace. And that evening, in her gown of white silk spangled with gold, she showed herself so delighted with life, so securely happy in the thought that she was free, that she loved and was loved in return, that the whispered tidings, the malicious remarks exchanged behind the fans of those around her, seemed to turn to

her personal triumph. For a moment all eyes had sought her, and people talked of the outcome of her connection with Prada, the man whose manhood the Church solemnly denied by its decision of that very day! And there came stifled laughter and whispered jests, whilst she, radiant in her insolent serenity, accepted with a rapturous air the gallantry of Monsignor Fornaro, who congratulated her on a painting of the Virgin with the lily, which she had lately sent to a fine-art show.

Ah! that matrimonial nullity suit, which for a year had supplied Rome with scandal, what a final hubbub it occasioned as the tidings of its termination burst forth amidst that ball! The black and white worlds had long chosen it as a battlefield for the exchange of incredible slander, endless gossip, the most nonsensical tittle-tattle. And now it was over; the Vatican with imperturbable impudence had pronounced the marriage null and void on the ground that the husband was no man, and all Rome would laugh over the affair, with that free scepticism which it displayed as soon as the pecuniary affairs of the Church came into question. The incidents of the struggle were already common property: Prada's feelings revolting to such a point that he had withdrawn from the contest, the Boccaneras moving heaven and earth in their feverish anxiety, the money which they had distributed among the creatures of the various cardinals in order to gain their influence, and the large sum which they had indirectly paid for the second and favourable report of Monsignor Palma. People said that, altogether, more than a hundred thousand francs had been expended,

but this was not thought over-much, as a well-known French countess had been obliged to disburse nearly ten times that amount to secure the dissolution of her marriage. But then the Holy Father's need was so great! And, moreover, nobody was angered by this venality; it merely gave rise to malicious witticisms; and the fans continued waving in the increasing heat, and the ladies quivered with contentment as the whispered pleasantries took wing and fluttered over their bare shoulders.

"Oh! how pleased the Contessina must be!" Pierre resumed. "I did not understand what her little friend, Princess Celia, meant by saying when we came in that she would be so happy and beautiful this evening. It is doubtless on that account that she is coming here, after cloistering herself all the time the affair lasted, as if she were in mourning."

However, Lisbeth's eyes had chanced to meet those of Narcisse, and as she smiled at him he was, in his turn, obliged to pay his respects to her, for, like everybody else of the foreign colony, he knew her through having visited her studio. He was again returning to Pierre when a fresh outburst of emotion stirred the diamond aigrettes and the flowers adorning the ladies' hair. People turned to see what was the matter, and again did the hubbub increase. "Ah! it's Count Prada in person!" murmured Narcisse, with an admiring glance. "He has a fine bearing, whatever folks may say. Dress him up in velvet and gold, and what a splendid, unscrupulous, fifteenth-century adventurer he would make!"

Prada entered the room, looking quite gay, in fact,

almost triumphant. And above his large, white shirt-front, edged by the black of his coat, he really had a commanding, predacious expression, with his frank, stern eyes, and his energetic features barred by a large black moustache. Never had a more rapturous smile of sensuality revealed the wolfish teeth of his voracious mouth. With rapid glances he took stock of the women, dived into their very souls. Then, on seeing Lisbeth, who looked so pink, and fair, and girlish, his expression softened, and he frankly went up to her, without troubling in the slightest degree about the ardent, inquisitive eyes which were turned upon him. As soon as Monsignor Fornaro had made room, he stooped and conversed with the young woman in a low tone. And she no doubt confirmed the news which was circulating, for as he again drew himself erect, he laughed a somewhat forced laugh, and made an involuntary gesture.

However, he then caught sight of Pierre, and joined him in the embrasure of the window; and when he had also shaken hands with Narcisse, he said to the young priest with all his wonted *bravura*: "You recollect what I told you as we were coming back from Frascati? Well, it's done, it seems, they've annulled my marriage. It's such an impudent, such an imbecile decision, that I still doubted it a moment ago!"

"Oh! the news is certain," Pierre made bold to reply. "It has just been confirmed to us by Monsignor Fornaro, who had it from a member of the Congregation. And it is said that the majority was very large."

Prada again shook with laughter. "No, no," said

he, "such a farce is beyond belief! It's the finest smack given to justice and common-sense that I know of. Ah! if the marriage can also be annulled by the civil courts, and if my friend whom you see yonder be only willing, we shall amuse ourselves in Rome! Yes, indeed, I'd marry her at Santa Maria Maggiore with all possible pomp. And there's a dear little being in the world who would take part in the *fête* in his nurse's arms!"

He laughed too loud as he spoke, alluded in too brutal a fashion to his child, that living proof of his manhood. Was it suffering that made his lips curve upwards and reveal his white teeth? It could be divined that he was quivering, fighting against an awakening of covert, tumultuous passion, which he would not acknowledge even to himself.

"And you, my dear Abbé?" he hastily resumed. "Do you know the other report? Do you know that the Countess is coming here?" It was thus, by force of habit, that he designated Benedetta, forgetting that she was no longer his wife.

"Yes, I have just been told so," Pierre replied; and then he hesitated for a moment before adding, with a desire to prevent any disagreeable surprise: "And we shall no doubt see Prince Dario also, for he has not started for Naples as I told you. Something prevented his departure at the last moment, I believe. At least so I gathered from a servant."

Prada no longer laughed. His face suddenly became grave, and he contented himself with murmuring: "Ah! so the cousin is to be of the party. Well, we shall see them, we shall see them both!"

Then, whilst the two friends went on chatting, he became silent, as if serious considerations impelled him to reflect. And suddenly making a gesture of apology he withdrew yet farther into the embrasure in which he stood, pulled a note-book out of his pocket, and tore from it a leaf on which, without modifying his handwriting otherwise than by slightly enlarging it, he pencilled these four lines: "A legend avers that the fig-tree of Judas now grows at Frascati, and that its fruit is deadly for him who may desire to become Pope. Eat not the poisoned figs, nor give them either to your servants or your fowls." Then he folded the paper, fastened it with a postage stamp, and wrote on it the address: "To his most Reverend and most Illustrious Eminence, Cardinal Boccanera." And when he had placed everything in his pocket again, he drew a long breath and once more called back his laugh.

A kind of invincible discomfort, a far-away terror had momentarily frozen him. Without being guided by any clear train of reasoning, he had felt the need of protecting himself against any cowardly temptation, any possible abomination. He could not have told what course of ideas had induced him to write those four lines without a moment's delay, on the very spot where he stood, under penalty of contributing to a great catastrophe. But one thought was firmly fixed in his brain, that on leaving the ball he would go to the Via Giulia and throw that note into the letter-box at the Palazzo Boccanera. And that decided, he was once more easy in mind.

"Why, what is the matter with you, my dear

Abbé?" he inquired on again joining in the conversation of the two friends. "You are quite gloomy." And on Pierre telling him of the bad news which he had received, the condemnation of his book, and the single day which remained to him for action if he did not wish his journey to Rome to result in defeat, he began to protest as if he himself needed agitation and diversion in order to continue hopeful and bear the ills of life. "Never mind, never mind, don't worry yourself," said he, "one loses all one's strength by worrying. A day is a great deal, one can do ever so many things in a day. An hour, a minute suffices for Destiny to intervene and turn defeat into victory!" He grew feverish as he spoke, and all at once added, "Come, let's go to the ball-room. It seems that the scene there is something prodigious."

Then he exchanged a last loving glance with Lisbeth whilst Pierre and Narcisse followed him, the three of them extricating themselves from their corner with the greatest difficulty, and then wending their way towards the adjoining gallery through a sea of serried skirts, a billowy expanse of necks and shoulders whence ascended the passion which makes life, the odour alike of love and of death.

With its eight windows overlooking the Corso, their panes uncurtained and throwing a blaze of light upon the houses across the road, the picture gallery, sixty-five feet in length and more than thirty in breadth, spread out with incomparable splendour. The illumination was dazzling. Clusters of electric lamps had changed seven pairs of huge marble candelabra into gigantic *torchères*, akin to constellations; and all along

the cornice up above, other lamps set in bright-hued floral glasses formed a marvellous garland of flaming flowers: tulips, pæonies, and roses. The antique red velvet worked with gold, which draped the walls, glowed like a furnace fire. About the doors and windows there were hangings of old lace broidered with flowers in coloured silk whose hues had the very intensity of life. But the sight of sights beneath the sumptuous panelled ceiling adorned with golden roses, the unique spectacle of a richness not to be equalled, was the collection of masterpieces such as no museum could excel. There were works of Raffaele and Titian, Rembrandt and Rubens, Velasquez and Ribera, famous works which in this unexpected illumination suddenly showed forth, triumphant with youth regained, as if awakened to the immortal life of genius. And, as their Majesties would not arrive before midnight, the ball had just been opened, and flights of soft-hued gowns were whirling in a waltz past all the pompous throng, the glittering jewels and decorations, the gold-broidered uniforms and the pearl-broidered robes, whilst silk and satin and velvet spread and overflowed upon every side.

"It is prodigious, really!" declared Prada with his excited air; "let us go this way and place ourselves in a window recess again. There is no better spot for getting a good view without being too much jostled."

They lost Narcisse somehow or other, and on reaching the desired recess found themselves but two, Pierre and the Count. The orchestra, installed on a little platform at the far end of the gallery, had just fin-

ished the waltz, and the dancers, with an air of giddy rapture, were slowly walking through the crowd when a fresh arrival caused every head to turn. Donna Serafina, arrayed in a robe of purple silk as if she had worn the colours of her brother the Cardinal, was making a royal entry on the arm of Consistorial-Advocate Morano. And never before had she laced herself so tightly, never had her waist looked so slim and girlish; and never had her stern, wrinkled face, which her white hair scarcely softened, expressed such stubborn and victorious domination. A discreet murmur of approval ran round, a murmur of public relief as it were, for all Roman society had condemned the unworthy conduct of Morano in severing a connection of thirty years to which the drawing-rooms had grown as accustomed as if it had been a legal marriage. The rupture had lasted for two months, to the great scandal of Rome where the cult of long and faithful affections still abides. And so the reconciliation touched every heart and was regarded as one of the happiest consequences of the victory which the Boccaneras had that day gained in the affair of Benedetta's marriage. Morano repentant and Donna Serafina reappearing on his arm, nothing could have been more satisfactory; love had conquered, decorum was preserved and good order re-established.

But there was a deeper sensation as soon as Benedetta and Dario were seen to enter, side by side, behind the others. This tranquil indifference for the ordinary forms of propriety, on the very day when the marriage with Prada had been annulled, this victory of love, confessed and celebrated before one and all,

seemed so charming in its audacity, so full of the bravery of youth and hope, that the pair were at once forgiven amidst a murmur of universal admiration. And as in the case of Celia and Attilio, all hearts flew to them, to their radiant beauty, to the wondrous happiness that made their faces so resplendent. Dario, still pale after his long convalescence, somewhat slight and delicate of build, with the fine clear eyes of a big child, and the dark curly beard of a young god, bore himself with a light pride, in which all the old princely blood of the Boccaneras could be traced. And Benedetta, she so white under her casque of jetty hair, she so calm and so sensible, wore her lovely smile, that smile so seldom seen on her face but which was irresistibly fascinating, transfiguring her, imparting the charm of a flower to her somewhat full mouth, and filling the infinite of her dark and fathomless eyes with a radiance as of heaven. And in this gay return of youth and happiness, an exquisite instinct had prompted her to put on a white gown, a plain girlish gown which symbolised her maidenhood, which told that she had remained through all a pure untarnished lily for the husband of her choice. And nothing of her form was to be seen, not a glimpse of bosom or shoulder. It was as if the impenetrable, redoubtable mystery of love, the sovereign beauty of woman slumbered there, all powerful, but veiled with white. Again, not a jewel appeared on her fingers or in her ears. There was simply a necklace falling about her *corsage*, but a necklace fit for royalty, the famous pearl necklace of the Boccaneras, which she had inherited from her mother, and which was known to all Rome

— pearls of fabulous size cast negligently about her neck, and sufficing, simply as she was gowned, to make her queen of all.

“Oh!” murmured Pierre in ecstasy, “how happy and how beautiful she is!”

But he at once regretted that he had expressed his thoughts aloud, for beside him he heard a low plaint, an involuntary growl which reminded him of the Count's presence. However, Prada promptly stifled this cry of returning anguish, and found strength enough to affect a brutish gaiety: “The devil!” said he, “they have plenty of impudence. I hope we shall see them married and bedded at once!” Then regretting this coarse jest which had been prompted by the revolt of passion, he sought to appear indifferent: “She looks very nice this evening,” he said; “she has the finest shoulders in the world, you know, and its a real success for her to hide them and yet appear more beautiful than ever.”

He went on speaking, contriving to assume an easy tone, and giving various little particulars about the Countess as he still obstinately called the young woman. However, he had drawn rather further into the recess, for fear, no doubt, that people might remark his pallor, and the painful twitch which contracted his mouth. He was in no state to fight, to show himself gay and insolent in presence of the joy which the lovers so openly and naïvely expressed. And he was glad of the respite which the arrival of the King and Queen at this moment offered him. “Ah! here are their Majesties!” he exclaimed, turn-

ing towards the window. "Look at the scramble in the street!"

Although the windows were closed, a tumult could be heard rising from the footways. And Pierre on looking down saw, by the light of the electric lamps, a sea of human heads pour over the road and encompass the carriages. He had several times already seen the King during the latter's daily drives to the grounds of the Villa Borghese, whither he came like any private gentleman—unguarded, unescorted, with merely an aide-de-camp accompanying him in his victoria. At other times he drove a light phaeton with only a footman in black livery to attend him. And on one occasion Pierre had seen him with the Queen, the pair of them seated side by side like worthy middle-class folks driving abroad for pleasure. And, as the royal couple went by, the busy people in the streets and the promenaders in the public gardens contented themselves with wafting them an affectionate wave of the hand, the most expansive simply approaching to smile at them, and no one importuning them with acclamations. Pierre, who harboured the traditional idea of kings closely guarded and passing processionally with all the accompaniment of military pomp, was therefore greatly surprised and touched by the amiable *bonhomie* of this royal pair, who went wherever they listed in full security amidst the smiling affection of their people. Everybody, moreover, had told him of the King's kindness and simplicity, his desire for peace, and his passion for sport, solitude, and the open air, which, amidst the worries of power, must often have made him dream

of a life of freedom far from the imperious duties of royalty for which he seemed unfitted.¹ But the Queen was yet more tenderly loved. So naturally and serenely virtuous that she alone remained ignorant of the scandals of Rome, she was also a woman of great culture and great refinement, conversant with every field of literature, and very happy in being so intelligent, so superior to those around her — a pre-eminence which she realised and which she was fond of showing, but in the most natural and most graceful of ways.

Like Pierre, Prada had remained with his face to the window, and suddenly pointing to the crowd he said: "Now that they have seen the Queen they will go to bed well pleased. And there isn't a single police agent there, I'm sure. Ah! to be loved, to be loved!" Plainly enough his distress of spirit was coming back, and so, turning towards the gallery again, he tried to play the jester. "Attention, my dear Abbé, we mustn't miss their Majesties' entry. That will be the finest part of the *fête*!"

A few minutes went by, and then, in the very midst of a polka, the orchestra suddenly ceased playing. But a moment afterwards, with all the blare of its brass instruments, it struck up the Royal March. The dancers fled in confusion, the centre of the gallery was cleared, and the King and Queen entered, escorted by the Prince and Princess Buongiovanni, who had received them at the foot of the staircase. The King

¹ King Humbert inherited these tastes from his father Victor Emanuel, who was likewise a great sportsman and had a perfect horror of court life, pageantry, and the exigencies of politics. — *Trans.*

was in ordinary evening dress, while the Queen wore a robe of straw-coloured satin, covered with superb white lace; and under the diadem of brilliants which encircled her beautiful fair hair, she looked still young, with a fresh and rounded face, whose expression was all amiability, gentleness, and wit. The music was still sounding with the enthusiastic violence of welcome. Behind her father and mother, Celia appeared amidst the press of people who were following to see the sight; and then came Attilio, the Saccos, and various relatives and official personages. And, pending the termination of the Royal March, only salutations, glances, and smiles were exchanged amidst the sonorous music and dazzling light; whilst all the guests crowded around on tip-toe, with outstretched necks and glittering eyes—a rising tide of heads and shoulders, flashing with the fires of precious stones.

At last the march ended and the presentations began. Their Majesties were already acquainted with Celia, and congratulated her with quite affectionate kindness. However, Sacco, both as minister and father, was particularly desirous of presenting his son Attilio. He bent his supple spine, and summoned to his lips the fine words which were appropriate, in such wise that he contrived to make the young man bow to the King in the capacity of a lieutenant in his Majesty's army, whilst his homage as a handsome young man, so passionately loved by his betrothed was reserved for Queen Margherita. Again did their Majesties show themselves very gracious, even towards the Signora Sacco who, ever modest and prudent, had

remained in the background. And then occurred an incident that was destined to give rise to endless gossip. Catching sight of Benedetta, whom Count Prada had presented to her after his marriage, the Queen, who greatly admired her beauty and charm of manner, addressed her a smile in such wise that the young woman was compelled to approach. A conversation of some minutes' duration ensued, and the Contessina was favoured with some extremely amiable expressions which were perfectly audible to all around. Most certainly the Queen was ignorant of the event of the day, the dissolution of Benedetta's marriage with Prada, and her coming union with Dario so publicly announced at this *gala*, which now seemed to have been given to celebrate a double betrothal. Nevertheless that conversation caused a deep impression; the guests talked of nothing but the compliments which Benedetta had received from the most virtuous and intelligent of queens, and her triumph was increased by it all, she became yet more beautiful and more victorious amidst the happiness she felt at being at last able to bestow herself on the spouse of her choice, that happiness which made her look so radiant.

But, on the other hand, the torture which Prada experienced now became intense. Whilst the sovereigns continued conversing, the Queen with the ladies who came to pay her their respects, the King with the officers, diplomatists, and other important personages who approached him, Prada saw none but Benedetta — Benedetta congratulated, caressed, exalted by affection and glory. Dario was near her,

flushing with pleasure, radiant like herself. It was for them that this ball had been given, for them that the lamps shone out, for them that the music played, for them that the most beautiful women of Rome had bared their bosoms and adorned them with precious stones. It was for them that their Majesties had entered to the strains of the Royal March, for them that the *fête* was becoming like an apotheosis, for them that a fondly loved queen was smiling, appearing at that betrothal *gala* like the good fairy of the nursery tales, whose coming betokens life-long happiness. And for Prada, this wondrously brilliant hour when good fortune and joyfulness attained their apogee, was one of defeat. It was fraught with the victory of that woman who had refused to be his wife in aught but name, and of that man who now was about to take her from him: such a public, ostentatious, insulting victory that it struck him like a buffet in the face. And not merely did his pride and passion bleed for that: he felt that the triumph of the Saccos dealt a blow to his fortune. Was it true, then, that the rough conquerors of the North were bound to deteriorate in the delightful climate of Rome, was that the reason why he already experienced such a sensation of weariness and exhaustion? That very morning at Frascati in connection with that disastrous building enterprise he had realised that his millions were menaced, albeit he refused to admit that things were going badly with him, as some people rumoured. And now, that evening, amidst that *fête* he beheld the South victorious, Sacco winning the day like one who feeds at his ease on the

warm prey so gluttonously pounced upon under the flaming sun.

And the thought of Sacco being a minister, an intimate of the King, allying himself by marriage to one of the noblest families of the Roman aristocracy, and already laying hands on the people and the national funds with the prospect of some day becoming the master of Rome and Italy — that thought again was a blow for the vanity of this man of prey, for the ever voracious appetite of this enjoyer, who felt as if he were being pushed away from table before the feast was over! All crumbled and escaped him, Sacco stole his millions, and Benedetta tortured his flesh, stirring up that awful wound of unsatisfied passion which never would be healed.

Again did Pierre hear that dull plaint, that involuntary despairing growl, which had upset him once before. And he looked at the Count, and asked him: "Are you suffering?" But on seeing how livid was the face of Prada, who only retained his calmness by a superhuman effort, he regretted his indiscreet question, which, moreover, remained unanswered. And then to put the other more at ease, the young priest went on speaking, venting the thoughts which the sight before him inspired: "Your father was right," said he, "we Frenchmen whose education is so full of the Catholic spirit, even in these days of universal doubt, we never think of Rome otherwise than as the old Rome of the popes. We scarcely know, we can scarcely understand the great changes which, year by year, have brought about the Italian Rome of the present day. Why, when I arrived here, the King

and his government and the young nation working to make a great capital for itself, seemed to me of no account whatever! Yes, I dismissed all that, thought nothing of it, in my dream of resuscitating a Christian and evangelical Rome, which should assure the happiness of the world."

He laughed as he spoke, pitying his own artlessness, and then pointed towards the gallery where Prince Buongiovanni was bowing to the King whilst the Princess listened to the gallant remarks of Sacco: a scene full of symbolism, the old papal aristocracy struck down, the *parvenus* accepted, the black and white worlds so mixed together that one and all were little else than subjects, on the eve of forming but one united nation. That conciliation between the Quirinal and the Vatican which in principle was regarded as impossible, was it not in practice fatal, in face of the evolution which went on day by day? People must go on living, loving, and creating life throughout the ages. And the marriage of Attilio and Celia would be the symbol of the needful union: youth and love triumphing over ancient hatred, all quarrels forgotten as a handsome lad goes by, wins a lovely girl, and carries her off in his arms in order that the world may last.

"Look at them!" resumed Pierre, "how handsome and young and gay both the *fiancés* are, all confidence in the future. Ah! I well understand that your King should have come here to please his minister and win one of the old Roman families over to his throne; it is good, brave, and fatherly policy. But I like to think that he has also realised the touching significance of that marriage — old Rome, in the person of that can-

did, loving child giving herself to young Italy, that upright, enthusiastic young man who wears his uniform so jauntily. And may their nuptials be definitive and fruitful; from them and from all the others may there arise the great nation which, now that I begin to know you, I trust you will soon become!"

Amidst the tottering of his former dream of an evangelical and universal Rome, Pierre expressed these good wishes for the Eternal City's future fortune with such keen and deep emotion that Prada could not help replying: "I thank you; that wish of yours is in the heart of every good Italian."

But his voice quavered, for even whilst he was looking at Celia and Attilio, who stood smiling and talking together, he saw Benedetta and Dario approach them, wearing the same joyful expression of perfect happiness. And when the two couples were united, so radiant and so triumphant, so full of superb and happy life, he no longer had strength to stay there, see them, and suffer.

"I am frightfully thirsty," he hoarsely exclaimed. "Let's go to the buffet to drink something." And, thereupon, in order to avoid notice, he so manœuvred as to glide behind the throng, skirting the windows in the direction of the entrance to the Hall of the Antiques, which was beyond the gallery.

Whilst Pierre was following him they were parted by an eddy of the crowd, and the young priest found himself carried towards the two loving couples who still stood chatting together. And Celia, on recognising him, beckoned to him in a friendly way. With her passionate cult for beauty, she was enraptured with

the appearance of Benedetta, before whom she joined her little lily hands as before the image of the Madonna. "Oh! Monsieur l'Abbé," said she, "to please me now, do tell her how beautiful she is, more beautiful than anything on earth, more beautiful than even the sun, and the moon and stars. If you only knew, my dear, it makes me quiver to see you so beautiful as that, as beautiful as happiness, as beautiful as love itself!"

Benedetta began to laugh, while the two young men made merry. "But you are as beautiful as I am, darling," said the Contessina. "And if we are beautiful it is because we are happy."

"Yes, yes, happy," Celia gently responded. "Do you remember the evening when you told me that one didn't succeed in marrying the Pope and the King? But Attilio and I are marrying them, and yet we are very happy."

"But we don't marry them, Dario and I! On the contrary!" said Benedetta gaily. "No matter; as you answered me that same evening, it is sufficient that we should love one another, love saves the world."

When Pierre at last succeeded in reaching the door of the Hall of the Antiques, where the buffet was installed, he found Prada there, motionless, gazing despite himself on the galling spectacle which he desired to flee. A power stronger than his will had kept him there, forcing him to turn round and look, and look again. And thus, with a bleeding heart, he still lingered and witnessed the resumption of the dancing, the first figure of a quadrille which the orchestra began to play with a lively flourish of its brass instruments. Bene-

detta and Dario, Celia and Attilio were *vis-à-vis*. And so charming and delightful was the sight which the two couples presented dancing in the white blaze, all youth and joy, that the King and Queen drew near to them and became interested. And soon bravos of admiration rang out, while from every heart spread a feeling of infinite tenderness.

"I'm dying of thirst, let's go!" repeated Prada, at last managing to wrench himself away from the torturing sight.

He called for some iced lemonade and drank the glassful at one draught, gulping it down with the greedy eagerness of a man stricken with fever, who will never more be able to quench the burning fire within him.

The Hall of the Antiques was a spacious room with mosaic pavement, and decorations of stucco; and a famous collection of vases, bas-reliefs, and statues, was disposed along its walls. The marbles predominated, but there were a few bronzes, and among them a dying gladiator of extreme beauty. The marvel however was the famous statue of Venus, a companion to that of the Capitol, but with a more elegant and supple figure and with the left arm falling loosely in a gesture of voluptuous surrender. That evening a powerful electric reflector threw a dazzling light upon the statue, which, in its divine and pure nudity, seemed to be endowed with superhuman, immortal life. Against the end-wall was the buffet, a long table covered with an embroidered cloth and laden with fruit, pastry, and cold meats. Sheaves of flowers rose up amidst bottles of champagne, hot punch, and

iced *sorbetto*, and here and there were marshalled armies of glasses, tea-cups, and broth-bowls, a perfect wealth of sparkling crystal, porcelain, and silver. And a happy innovation had been to fill half of the hall with rows of little tables, at which the guests, in lieu of being obliged to refresh themselves standing, were able to sit down and order what they desired as in a café.

At one of these little tables, Pierre perceived Narcisse seated near a young woman, whom Prada, on approaching, recognised to be Lisbeth. "You find me, you see, in delightful company," gallantly exclaimed the *attaché*. "As we lost one another, I could think of nothing better than of offering madame my arm to bring her here."

"It was, in fact, a good idea," said Lisbeth with her pretty laugh, "for I was feeling very thirsty."

They had ordered some iced coffee, which they were slowly sipping out of little silver-gilt spoons.

"I have a terrible thirst, too," declared the Count, "and I can't quench it. You will allow us to join you, will you not, my dear sir? Some of that coffee will perhaps calm me." And then to Lisbeth he added, "Ah! my dear, allow me to introduce to you Monsieur l'Abbé Froment, a young French priest of great distinction."

Then for a long time they all four remained seated at that table, chatting and making merry over certain of the guests who went by. Prada, however, in spite of his usual gallantry towards Lisbeth, frequently became absent-minded; at times he quite forgot her, being again mastered by his anguish, and, in spite

of all his efforts, his eyes ever turned towards the neighbouring gallery whence the sound of music and dancing reached him.

"Why, what are you thinking of, *caro mio*?" Lisbeth asked in her pretty way, on seeing him at one moment so pale and lost. "Are you indisposed?"

He did not reply, however, but suddenly exclaimed, "Ah! look there, that's the real pair, there's real love and happiness for you!"

With a jerk of the hand he designated Dario's mother, the Marchioness Montefiori and her second husband, Jules Laporte—that ex-sergeant of the papal Swiss Guard, her junior by fifteen years, whom she had one day hooked at the Corso with her eyes of fire, which yet had remained superb, and whom she had afterwards triumphantly transformed into a Marquis Montefiori in order to have him entirely to herself. Such was her passion that she never relaxed her hold on him whether at ball or reception, but, despite all usages, kept him beside her, and even made him escort her to the buffet, so much did she delight in being able to exhibit him and say that this handsome man was her own exclusive property. And standing there side by side, the pair of them began to drink champagne and eat sandwiches, she yet a marvel of massive beauty although she was over fifty, and he with long wavy moustaches, and proud bearing, like a fortunate adventurer whose jovial impudence pleased the ladies.

"You know that she had to extricate him from a nasty affair," resumed the Count in a lower tone. "Yes, he travelled in relics; he picked up a living

by supplying relics on commission to convents in France and Switzerland; and he had launched quite a business in false relics with the help of some Jews here who concocted little ancient reliquaries out of mutton bones, with everything sealed and signed by the most genuine authorities. The affair was hushed up, as three prelates were also compromised in it! Ah! the happy man! Do you see how she devours him with her eyes? And he, doesn't he look quite a *grand seigneur* by the mere way in which he holds that plate for her whilst she eats the breast of a fowl out of it!"

Then, in a rough way and with biting irony, he went on to speak of the *amours* of Rome. The Roman women, said he, were ignorant, obstinate, and jealous. When a woman had managed to win a man, she kept him for ever, he became her property, and she disposed of him as she pleased. By way of proof, he cited many interminable *liaisons*, such as that of Donna Serafina and Morano which, in time became virtual marriages; and he sneered at such a lack of fancy, such an excess of fidelity whose only ending, when it did end, was some very disagreeable unpleasantness.

At this, Lisbeth interrupted him. "But what is the matter with you this evening, my dear?" she asked with a laugh. "What you speak of is on the contrary very nice and pretty! When a man and a woman love one another they ought to do so for ever!"

She looked delightful as she spoke, with her fine wavy *blonde* hair and delicate fair complexion; and Narcisse with a languorous expression in his half-

closed eyes compared her to a Botticelli which he had seen at Florence. However, the night was now far advanced, and Pierre had once more sunk into gloomy thoughtfulness when he heard a passing lady remark that they had already begun to dance the Cotillon in the gallery; and thereupon he suddenly remembered that Monsignor Nani had given him an appointment in the little Saloon of the Mirrors.

"Are you leaving?" hastily inquired Prada on seeing him rise and bow to Lisbeth.

"No, no, not yet," Pierre answered.

"Oh! all right. Don't go away without me. I want to walk a little, and I'll see you home. It's agreed, eh? You will find me here."

The young priest had to cross two rooms, one hung with yellow and the other with blue, before he at last reached the mirrored *salon*. This was really an exquisite example of the *rococo* style, a rotunda as it were of pale mirrors framed with superb gilded carvings. Even the ceiling was covered with mirrors disposed slantwise so that on every side things multiplied, mingled, and appeared under all possible aspects. Discreetly enough no electric lights had been placed in the room, the only illumination being that of some pink tapers burning in a pair of candelabra. The hangings and upholstery were of soft blue silk, and the impression on entering was very sweet and charming, as if one had found oneself in the abode of some fairy queen of the rills, a palace of limpid water, illumined to its farthest depths by clusters of stars.

Pierre at once perceived Monsignor Nani, who was

sitting on a low couch, and, as the prelate had hoped, he was quite alone, for the Cotillon had attracted almost everybody to the picture gallery. And the silence in the little *salon* was nearly perfect, for at that distance the blare of the orchestra subsided into a faint, flute-like murmur. The young priest at once apologised to the prelate for having kept him waiting.

"No, no, my dear son," said Nani, with his inexhaustible amiability. "I was very comfortable in this retreat—when the press of the crowd became over-threatening I took refuge here." He did not speak of the King and Queen, but he allowed it to be understood that he had politely avoided their company. If he had come to the *fête* it was on account of his sincere affection for Celia and also with a very delicate diplomatic object, for the Church wished to avoid any appearance of having entirely broken with the Buongiovanni family, that ancient house which was so famous in the annals of the papacy. Doubtless the Vatican was unable to subscribe to this marriage which seemed to unite old Rome with the young Kingdom of Italy, but on the other hand it did not desire people to think that it abandoned old and faithful supporters and took no interest in what befell them.

"But come, my dear son," the prelate resumed, "it is you who are now in question. I told you that although the Congregation of the Index had pronounced itself for the condemnation of your book, the sentence would only be submitted to the Holy Father and signed by him on the day after to-morrow. So you still have a whole day before you."

At this Pierre could not refrain from a dolorous and vivacious interruption.

"Alas! Monseigneur, what can I do?" said he; "I have thought it all over, and I see no means, no opportunity of defending myself. How could I even see his Holiness now that he is so ill?"

"Oh! ill, ill!" muttered Nani with his shrewd expression. "His Holiness is ever so much better, for this very day, like every other Wednesday, I had the honour to be received by him. When his Holiness is a little tired and people say that he is very ill, he often lets them do so, for it gives him a rest and enables him to judge certain ambitions and manifestations of impatience around him."

Pierre, however, was too upset to listen attentively. "No, it's all over," he continued, "I'm in despair. You spoke to me of the possibility of a miracle, but I am no great believer in miracles. Since I am defeated here at Rome, I shall go away, I shall return to Paris, and continue the struggle there. Oh! I cannot resign myself, my hope in salvation by the practice of love cannot die, and I shall answer my denouncers in a new book, in which I shall tell in what new soil the new religion will grow up!"

Silence fell. Nani looked at him with his clear eyes in which intelligence shone distinct and sharp like steel. And amidst the deep calm, the warm heavy atmosphere of the little *salon*, whose mirrors were starred with countless reflections of candles, a more sonorous burst of music was suddenly wafted from the gallery, a rhythmical waltz melody, which slowly expanded, then died away.

"My dear son," said Nani, "anger is always harmful. You remember that on your arrival here I promised that if your own efforts to obtain an interview with the Holy Father should prove unavailing, I would myself endeavour to secure an audience for you." Then, seeing how agitated the young priest was getting, he went on: "Listen to me and don't excite yourself. His Holiness, unfortunately, is not always prudently advised. Around him are persons whose devotion, however great, is at times deficient in intelligence. I told you that, and warned you against inconsiderate applications. And this is why, already three weeks ago, I myself handed your book to his Holiness in the hope that he would deign to glance at it. I rightly suspected that it had not been allowed to reach him. And this is what I am instructed to tell you: his Holiness, who has had the great kindness to read your book, expressly desires to see you."

A cry of joy and gratitude died away in Pierre's throat: "Ah! Monseigneur. Ah! Monseigneur!"

But Nani quickly silenced him and glanced around with an expression of keen anxiety as if he feared that some one might hear them. "Hush! Hush!" said he, "it is a secret. His Holiness wishes to see you privately, without taking anybody else into his confidence. Listen attentively. It is now two o'clock in the morning. Well, this very day, at nine in the evening precisely, you must present yourself at the Vatican and at every door ask for Signor Squadra. You will invariably be allowed to pass. Signor Squadra will be waiting for you upstairs, and

will introduce you. And not a word, mind; not a soul must have the faintest suspicion of these things."

Pierre's happiness and gratitude at last flowed forth. He had caught hold of the prelate's soft, plump hands, and stammered, "Ah! Monseigneur, how can I express my gratitude to you? If you only knew how full my soul was of night and rebellion since I realised that I had been a mere plaything in the hands of those powerful cardinals. But you have saved me, and again I feel sure that I shall win the victory, for I shall at last be able to fling myself at the feet of his Holiness the father of all truth and all justice. He can but absolve me, I who love him, I who admire him, I who have never battled for aught but his own policy and most cherished ideas. No, no, it is impossible; he will not sign that judgment; he will not condemn my book!"

Releasing his hands, Nani sought to calm him with a fatherly gesture, whilst retaining a faint smile of contempt for such a useless expenditure of enthusiasm. At last he succeeded, and begged him to retire. The orchestra was again playing more loudly in the distance. And when the young priest at last withdrew, thanking him once more, he said very simply, "Remember, my dear son, that only obedience is great."

Pierre, whose one desire now was to take himself off, found Prada almost immediately afterwards in the first reception-room. Their Majesties had just left the ball in grand ceremony, escorted to the threshold by the Buongiovannis and the Saccos. And before departing the Queen had maternally

kissed Celia, whilst the King shook hands with Attilio—honours instinct with a charming good nature which made the members of both families quite radiant. However, a good many of the guests were following the example of the sovereigns and disappearing in small batches. And the Count, who seemed strangely nervous, and showed more sternness and bitterness than ever, was, on his side, also eager to be gone. "Ah! it's you at last. I was waiting for you," he said to Pierre. "Well, let's get off at once, eh? Your compatriot Monsieur Narcisse Habert asked me to tell you not to look for him. The fact is, he has gone to see my friend Lisbeth to her carriage. I myself want a breath of fresh air, a stroll, and so I'll go with you as far as the Via Giulia."

Then, as they took their things from the cloak-room, he could not help sneering and saying in his brutal way: "I saw your good friends go off, all four together. It's lucky that you prefer to go home on foot, for there was no room for you in the carriage. What superb impudence it was on the part of that Donna Serafina to drag herself here, at her age, with that Morano of hers, so as to triumph over the return of the fickle one! And the two others, the two young ones—ah! I confess that I can hardly speak calmly of *them*, for in parading here together as they did this evening, they have shown an impudence and a cruelty such as is rarely seen!" Prada's hands trembled, and he murmured: "A good journey, a good journey to the young man, since he is going to Naples. Yes, I heard Celia say that he was starting for Naples this

evening at six o'clock. Well, my wishes go with him; a good journey!"

The two men found the change delightful when they at last emerged from the stifling heat of the reception-rooms into the lovely, cool, and limpid night. It was a night illumined by a superb full moon, one of those matchless Roman nights when the city slumbers in Elysian radiance, steeped in a dream of the Infinite, under the vast vault of heaven. And they took the most agreeable route, going down the Corso proper and then turning into the Corso Vittorio Emanuele.

Prada had grown somewhat calmer, but remained full of irony. To divert his mind, no doubt, he talked on in the most voluble manner, reverting to the women of Rome and to that *fête* which he had at first found splendid, but at which he now began to rail.

"Oh! of course they have very fine gowns," said he, speaking of the women; "but gowns which don't fit them, gowns which are sent them from Paris, and which, of course, they can't try on. It's just the same with their jewels; they still have diamonds and pearls, in particular, which are very fine, but they are so wretchedly, so heavily mounted that they look frightful. And if you only knew how ignorant and frivolous these women are, despite all their conceit! Everything is on the surface with them, even religion: there's nothing beneath. I looked at them eating at the buffet. Oh! they at least have fine appetites. This evening some decorum was observed, there wasn't too much gorging. But at one of the

Court balls you would see a general pillage, the buffets besieged, and everything swallowed up amidst a scramble of amazing voracity!"

To all this talk Pierre only returned monosyllabic responses. He was wrapped in overflowing delight at the thought of that audience with the Pope, which, unable as he was to confide in any one, he strove to arrange and picture in his own mind, even in its pettiest details. And meantime the footsteps of the two men rang out on the dry pavement of the clear, broad, deserted thoroughfare, whose black shadows were sharply outlined by the moonlight.

All at once Prada himself became silent. His loquacious *bravura* was exhausted, the frightful struggle going on in his mind wholly possessed and paralysed him. Twice already he had dipped his hand into his coat pocket and felt the pencilled note whose four lines he mentally repeated: "A legend avers that the fig-tree of Judas now grows at Frascati, and that its fruit is deadly for him who may desire to become pope. Eat not the poisoned figs, nor give them either to your servants or your fowls." The note was there; he could feel it; and if he had desired to accompany Pierre, it was in order that he might drop it into the letter-box at the Palazzo Boccanera. And he continued to step out briskly, so that within another ten minutes that note would surely be in the box, for no power in the world could prevent it, since such was his express determination. Never would he commit such a crime as to allow people to be poisoned.

But he was suffering such abominable torture.

That Benedetta and that Dario had raised such a tempest of jealous hatred within him! For them he forgot Lisbeth whom he loved, and even that flesh of his flesh, the child of whom he was so proud. All sex as he was, eager to conquer and subdue, he had never cared for facile loves. His passion was to overcome. And now there was a woman in the world who defied him, a woman forsooth whom he had bought, whom he had married, who had been handed over to him, but who would never, never be his. Ah! in the old days, to subdue her, he would if needful have fired Rome like a Nero; but now he asked himself what he could possibly do to prevent her from belonging to another. That galling thought made the blood gush from his gaping wound. How that woman and her lover must deride him! And to think that they had sought to turn him to ridicule by a baseless charge, an arrant lie which still and ever made him smart, all proof of its falsity to the contrary. He, on his side, had accused them in the past without much belief in what he said, but now the charges he had imputed to them must come true, for they were free, freed at all events of the religious bond, and that no doubt was their only care. And then visions of their happiness passed before his eyes, infuriating him. Ah! no, ah! no, it was impossible, he would rather destroy the world!

Then, as he and Pierre turned out of the Corso Vittorio Emanuele to thread the old narrow tortuous streets leading to the Via Giulia, he pictured himself dropping the note into the letter-box at the palazzo. And next he conjured up what would follow. The

note would lie in the letter-box till morning. At an early hour Don Vigilio, the secretary, who by the Cardinal's express orders kept the key of the box, would come down, find the note, and hand it to his Eminence, who never allowed another to open any communication addressed to him. And then the figs would be thrown away, there would be no further possibility of crime, the black world would in all prudence keep silent. But if the note should not be in the letter-box, what would happen then? And admitting that supposition he pictured the figs placed on the table at the one o'clock meal, in their pretty little leaf-covered basket. Dario would be there as usual, alone with his uncle, since he was not to leave for Naples till the evening. And would both the uncle and the nephew eat the figs, or would only one of them partake of the fruit, and which of them would that be? At this point Prada's clearness of vision failed him; again he conjured up Destiny on the march, that Destiny which he had met on the road from Frascati, going on towards its unknown goal, athwart all obstacles without possibility of stoppage. Aye, the little basket of figs went ever on and on to accomplish its fateful purpose, which no hand in the world had power enough to prevent.

And at last, on either hand of Pierre and Prada, the Via Giulia stretched away in a long line white with moonlight, and the priest emerged as if from a dream at sight of the Palazzo Boccanera rising blackly under the silver sky. Three o'clock struck at a neighbouring church. And he felt himself quivering slightly as once again he heard near him the dolorous

moan of a lion wounded unto death, that low involuntary growl which the Count, amidst the frightful struggle of his feelings, had for the third time allowed to escape him. But immediately afterwards he burst into a sneering laugh, and pressing the priest's hands, exclaimed: "No, no, I am not going farther. If I were seen here at this hour, people would think that I had fallen in love with my wife again."

And thereupon he lighted a cigar, and retraced his steps in the clear night, without once looking round.

XIII

WHEN Pierre awoke he was much surprised to hear eleven o'clock striking. Fatigued as he was by that ball where he had lingered so long, he had slept like a child in delightful peacefulness, and as soon as he opened his eyes the radiant sunshine filled him with hope. His first thought was that he would see the Pope that evening at nine o'clock. Ten more hours to wait! What would he be able to do with himself during that lovely day, whose radiant sky seemed to him of such happy augury? He rose and opened the windows to admit the warm air which, as he had noticed on the day of his arrival, had a savour of fruit and flowers, a blending, as it were, of the perfume of rose and orange. Could this possibly be December? What a delightful land, that the spring should seem to flower on the very threshold of winter! Then, having dressed, he was leaning out of the window to glance across the golden Tiber at the evergreen slopes of the Janiculum, when he espied Benedetta seated in the abandoned garden of the mansion. And thereupon, unable to keep still, full of a desire for life, gaiety, and beauty, he went down to join her.

With radiant visage and outstretched hands, she at once vented the cry he had expected: "Ah! my dear Abbé, how happy I am!"

They had often spent their mornings in that quiet, forsaken nook; but what sad mornings those had been, hopeless as they both were! To-day, however, the weed-grown paths, the box-plants growing in the old basin, the orange-trees which alone marked the outline of the beds—all seemed full of charm, instinct with a sweet and dreamy cosiness in which it was very pleasant to lull one's joy. And it was so warm, too, beside the big laurel-bush, in the corner where the streamlet of water ever fell with flute-like music from the gaping, tragic mask.

"Ah!" repeated Benedetta, "how happy I am! I was stifling upstairs, and my heart felt such a need of space, and air, and sunlight, that I came down here!"

She was seated on the fallen column beside the old marble sarcophagus, and desired the priest to place himself beside her. Never had he seen her looking so beautiful, with her black hair encompassing her pure face, which in the sunshine appeared pinky and delicate as a flower. Her large, fathomless eyes showed in the light like braziers rolling gold, and her childish mouth, all candour and good sense, laughed the laugh of one who was at last free to love as her heart listed, without offending either God or man. And, dreaming aloud, she built up plans for the future. "It's all simple enough," said she; "I have already obtained a separation, and shall easily get that changed into civil divorce now that the Church has annulled my marriage. And I shall marry Dario next spring, perhaps sooner, if the formalities can be hastened. He is going to Naples this evening about the sale of some property which we still possess there,

but which must now be sold, for all this business has cost us a lot of money. Still, that doesn't matter since we now belong to one another. And when he comes back in a few days, what a happy time we shall have! I could not sleep when I got back from that splendid ball last night, for my head was so full of plans — oh! splendid plans, as you shall see, for I mean to keep you in Rome until our marriage.”

Like herself, Pierre began to laugh, so gained upon by this explosion of youth and happiness that he had to make a great effort to refrain from speaking of his own delight, his hopefulness at the thought of his coming interview with the Pope. Of that, however, he had sworn to speak to nobody.

Every now and again, amidst the quivering silence of the sunlit garden, the cry of a bird persistently rang out; and Benedetta, raising her head and looking at a cage hanging beside one of the first-floor windows, jestingly exclaimed: “Yes, yes, Tata, make a good noise, show that you are pleased, my dear. Everybody in the house must be pleased now.” Then, turning towards Pierre, she added gaily: “You know Tata, don't you? What! No? Why, Tata is my uncle's parrot. I gave her to him last spring; he's very fond of her, and lets her help herself out of his plate. And he himself attends to her, puts her out and takes her in, and keeps her in his dining-room, for fear lest she should take cold, as that is the only room of his which is at all warm.”

Pierre in his turn looked up and saw the bird, one of those pretty little parrots with soft, silky, dull-green plumage. It was hanging by the beak from a bar of

its cage, swinging itself and flapping its wings, all mirth in the bright sunshine.

"Does the bird talk?" he asked.

"No, she only screams," replied Benedetta, laughing. "Still my uncle pretends that he understands her." And then the young woman abruptly darted to another subject, as if this mention of her uncle the Cardinal had made her think of the uncle by marriage whom she had in Paris. "I suppose you have heard from Viscount de la Choue," said she. "I had a letter from him yesterday, in which he said how grieved he was that you were unable to see the Holy Father, as he had counted on you for the triumph of his ideas."

Pierre indeed frequently heard from the Viscount, who was greatly distressed by the importance which his adversary, Baron de Fouras, had acquired since his success with the International Pilgrimage of the Peter's Pence. The old, uncompromising Catholic party would awaken, said the Viscount, and all the conquests of Neo-Catholicism would be threatened, if one could not obtain the Holy Father's formal adhesion to the proposed system of free guilds, in order to overcome the demand for closed guilds which was brought forward by the Conservatives. And the Viscount overwhelmed Pierre with injunctions, and sent him all sorts of complicated plans in his eagerness to see him received at the Vatican. "Yes, yes," muttered the young priest in reply to Benedetta. "I had a letter on Sunday, and found another waiting for me on my return from Frascati yesterday. Ah! it would make me very happy to be able to send the Viscount some good news." Then again Pierre's joy overflowed

at the thought that he would that evening see the Pope, and, on opening his loving heart to the Pontiff, receive the supreme encouragement which would strengthen him in his mission to work social salvation in the name of the lowly and the poor. And he could not restrain himself any longer, but let his secret escape him: "It's settled, you know," said he. "My audience is for this evening."

Benedetta did not understand at first. "What audience?" she asked.

"Oh! Monsignor Nani was good enough to tell me at the ball this morning, that the Holy Father has read my book and desires to see me. I shall be received this evening at nine o'clock."

At this the Contessina flushed with pleasure, participating in the delight of the young priest to whom she had grown much attached. And this success of his, coming in the midst of her own felicity, acquired extraordinary importance in her eyes as if it were an augury of complete success for one and all. Superstitious as she was, she raised a cry of rapture and excitement: "Ah! *Dio*, that will bring us good luck. How happy I am, my friend, to see happiness coming to you at the same time as to me! You cannot think how pleased I am! And all will go well now, it's certain, for a house where there is any one whom the Pope welcomes is blessed, the thunder of Heaven falls on it no more!"

She laughed yet more loudly as she spoke, and clapped her hands with such exuberant gaiety that Pierre became anxious. "Hush! hush!" said he, "it's a secret. Pray don't mention it to any one, either your aunt or

even his Eminence. Monsignor Nani would be much annoyed."

She thereupon promised to say nothing, and in a kindly voice spoke of Nani as a benefactor, for was she not indebted to him for the dissolution of her marriage? Then, with a fresh explosion of gaiety, she went on: "But come, my friend, is not happiness the only good thing? You don't ask me to weep over the suffering poor to-day! Ah! the happiness of life, that's everything. People don't suffer or feel cold or hungry when they are happy."

He looked at her in stupefaction at the idea of that strange solution of the terrible question of human misery. And suddenly he realised that, with that daughter of the sun who had inherited so many centuries of sovereign aristocracy, all his endeavours at conversion were vain. He had wished to bring her to a Christian love for the lowly and the wretched, win her over to the new, enlightened, and compassionate Italy that he had dreamt of; but if she had been moved by the sufferings of the multitude at the time when she herself had suffered, when grievous wounds had made her own heart bleed, she was no sooner healed than she proclaimed the doctrine of universal felicity like a true daughter of a clime of burning summers, and winters as mild as spring. "But everybody is not happy!" said he.

"Yes, yes, they are!" she exclaimed. "You don't know the poor! Give a girl of the Trastevere the lad she loves, and she becomes as radiant as a queen, and finds her dry bread quite sweet. The mothers who save a child from sickness, the men who conquer in a

battle, or who win at the lottery, one and all in fact are like that, people only ask for good fortune and pleasure. And despite all your striving to be just and to arrive at a more even distribution of fortune, the only satisfied ones will be those whose hearts sing — often without their knowing the cause — on a fine sunny day like this.”

Pierre made a gesture of surrender, not wishing to sadden her by again pleading the cause of all the poor ones who at that very moment were somewhere agonising with physical or mental pain. But, all at once, through the luminous mild atmosphere a shadow seemed to fall, tingeing joy with sadness, the sunshine with despair. And the sight of the old sarcophagus, with its bacchanal of satyrs and nymphs, brought back the memory that death lurks even amidst the bliss of passion, the unsatiated kisses of love. For a moment the clear song of the water sounded in Pierre's ears like a long-drawn sob, and all seemed to crumble in the terrible shadow which had fallen from the invisible.

Benedetta, however, caught hold of his hands and roused him once more to the delight of being there beside her. “Your pupil is rebellious, is she not, my friend?” said she. “But what would you have? There are ideas which can't enter into our heads. No, you will never get those things into the head of a Roman girl. So be content with loving us as we are, beautiful with all our strength, as beautiful as we can be.”

She herself, in her resplendent happiness, looked at that moment so beautiful that he trembled as in presence of a divinity whose all-powerfulness swayed the

world. "Yes, yes," he stammered, "beauty, beauty, still and ever sovereign. Ah! why can it not suffice to satisfy the eternal longings of poor suffering men?"

"Never mind!" she gaily responded. "Do not distress yourself; it is pleasant to live. And now let us go upstairs, my aunt must be waiting."

The midday meal was served at one o'clock, and on the few occasions when Pierre did not eat at one or another restaurant a cover was laid for him at the ladies' table in the little dining-room of the second floor, overlooking the courtyard. At the same hour, in the sunlit dining-room of the first floor, whose windows faced the Tiber, the Cardinal likewise sat down to table, happy in the society of his nephew Dario, for his secretary, Don Vigilio, who also was usually present, never opened his mouth unless to reply to some question. And the two services were quite distinct, each having its own kitchen and servants, the only thing at all common to them both being a large room downstairs which served as a pantry and store-place.

Although the second-floor dining-room was so gloomy, saddened by the greeny half-light of the courtyard, the meal shared that day by the two ladies and the young priest proved a very gay one. Even Donna Serafina, usually so rigid, seemed to relax under the influence of great internal felicity. She was no doubt still enjoying her triumph of the previous evening, and it was she who first spoke of the ball and sung its praises, though the presence of the King and Queen had much embarrassed her, said she. According to her account, she had only avoided presentation by skilful strategy;

however she hoped that her well-known affection for Celia, whose god-mother she was, would explain her presence in that neutral mansion where Vatican and Quirinal had met. At the same time she must have retained certain scruples, for she declared that directly after dinner she was going to the Vatican to see the Cardinal Secretary, to whom she desired to speak about an enterprise of which she was lady-patroness. This visit would compensate for her attendance at the Buongiovanni entertainment. And on the other hand never had Donna Serafina seemed so zealous and hopeful of her brother's speedy accession to the throne of St. Peter: therein lay a supreme triumph, an elevation of her race, which her pride deemed both needful and inevitable; and indeed during Leo XIII's last indisposition she had actually concerned herself about the trousseau which would be needed and which would require to be marked with the new Pontiff's arms.

On her side, Benedetta was all gaiety during the repast, laughing at everything, and speaking of Celia and Attilio with the passionate affection of a woman whose own happiness delights in that of her friends. Then, just as the dessert had been served, she turned to the servant with an air of surprise: "Well, and the figs, Giacomo?" she asked.

Giacomo, slow and sleepy of motion, looked at her without understanding. However, Victorine was crossing the room, and Benedetta's next question was for her: "Why are the figs not served, Victorine?" she inquired.

"What figs, Contessina?"

"Why the figs I saw in the pantry as I passed

through it this morning on my way to the garden. They were in a little basket and looked superb. I was even astonished to see that there were still some fresh figs left at this season. I'm very fond of them, and felt quite pleased at the thought that I should eat some at dinner."

Victorine began to laugh: "Ah! yes, Contessina, I understand," she replied. "They were some figs which that priest of Frascati, whom you know very well, brought yesterday evening as a present for his Eminence. I was there, and I heard him repeat three or four times that they were a present, and were to be put on his Eminence's table without a leaf being touched. And so one did as he said."

"Well, that's nice," retorted Benedetta with comical indignation. "What *gourmands* my uncle and Dario are to regale themselves without us! They might have given us a share!"

Donna Serafina thereupon intervened, and asked Victorine: "You are speaking, are you not, of that priest who used to come to the villa at Frascati?"

"Yes, yes, Abbé Santobono his name is, he officiates at the little church of St. Mary in the Fields. He always asks for Abbé Paparelli when he calls; I think they were at the seminary together. And it was Abbé Paparelli who brought him to the pantry with his basket last night. To tell the truth, the basket was forgotten there in spite of all the injunctions, so that nobody would have eaten the figs to-day if Abbé Paparelli hadn't run down just now and carried them upstairs as piously as if they were the Blessed Sacrament. It's true though that his Eminence is so fond of them."

"My brother won't do them much honour to-day," remarked the Princess. "He is slightly indisposed. He passed a bad night." The repeated mention of Abbé Paparelli had made the old lady somewhat thoughtful. She had regarded the train-bearer with displeasure ever since she had noticed the extraordinary influence he was gaining over the Cardinal, despite all his apparent humility and self-effacement. He was but a servant and apparently a very insignificant one, yet he governed, and she could feel that he combated her own influence, often undoing things which she had done to further her brother's interests. Twice already, moreover, she had suspected him of having urged the Cardinal to courses which she looked upon as absolute blunders. But perhaps she was wrong; she did the train-bearer the justice to admit that he had great merits and displayed exemplary piety.

However, Benedetta went on laughing and jesting, and as Victorine had now withdrawn, she called the man-servant: "Listen, Giacomo, I have a commission for you." Then she broke off to say to her aunt and Pierre: "Pray let us assert our rights. I can see them at table almost underneath us. Uncle is taking the leaves off the basket and serving himself with a smile; then he passes the basket to Dario, who passes it on to Don Vigilio. And all three of them eat and enjoy the figs. You can see them, can't you?" She herself could see them well. And it was her desire to be near Dario, the constant flight of her thoughts to him that now made her picture him at table with the others. Her heart was down below, and there was nothing there that she could not see, and hear, and

smell, with such keenness of the senses did her love endow her. "Giaccomo," she resumed, "you are to go down and tell his Eminence that we are longing to taste his figs, and that it will be very kind of him if he will send us such as he can spare."

Again, however, did Donna Serafina intervene, recalling her wonted severity of voice: "Giaccomo, you will please stay here." And to her niece she added: "That's enough childishness! I dislike such silly freaks."

"Oh! aunt," Benedetta murmured. "But I'm so happy, it's so long since I laughed so good-heartedly."

Pierre had hitherto remained listening, enlivened by the sight of her gaiety. But now, as a little chill fell, he raised his voice to say that on the previous day he himself had been astonished to see the famous fig-tree of Frascati still bearing fruit so late in the year. This was doubtless due, however, to the tree's position and the protection of a high wall.

"Ah! so you saw the tree?" said Benedetta.

"Yes, and I even travelled with those figs which you would so much like to taste."

"Why, how was that?"

The young man already regretted the reply which had escaped him. However, having gone so far, he preferred to say everything. "I met somebody at Frascati who had come there in a carriage and who insisted on driving me back to Rome," said he. "On the way we picked up Abbé Santobono, who was bravely making the journey on foot with his basket in his hand. And afterwards we stopped at an *osteria* —" Then he went on to describe the drive and

relate his impressions whilst crossing the Campagna amidst the falling twilight. But Benedetta gazed at him fixedly, aware as she was of Prada's frequent visits to the land and houses which he owned at Frascati; and suddenly she murmured: "Somebody, somebody, it was the Count, was it not?"

"Yes, madame, the Count," Pierre answered. "I saw him again last night; he was overcome, and really deserves to be pitied."

The two women took no offence at this charitable remark which fell from the young priest with such deep and natural emotion, full as he was of overflowing love and compassion for one and all. Donna Serafina remained motionless as if she had not even heard him, and Benedetta made a gesture which seemed to imply that she had neither pity nor hatred to express for a man who had become a perfect stranger to her. However, she no longer laughed, but, thinking of the little basket which had travelled in Prada's carriage, she said: "Ah! I don't care for those figs at all now, I am even glad that I haven't eaten any of them."

Immediately after the coffee Donna Serafina withdrew, saying that she was at once going to the Vatican; and the others, being left to themselves, lingered at table, again full of gaiety, and chatting like friends. The priest, with his feverish impatience, once more referred to the audience which he was to have that evening. It was now barely two o'clock, and he had seven more hours to wait. How should he employ that endless afternoon? Thereupon Benedetta good-naturedly made him a proposal. "I'll tell you what," said she, "as we are all in such good spirits we mustn't

leave one another. Dario has his victoria, you know. He must have finished lunch by now, and I'll ask him to take us for a long drive along the Tiber."

This fine project so delighted her that she began to clap her hands; but just then Don Vigilio appeared with a scared look on his face. "Isn't the Princess here?" he inquired.

"No, my aunt has gone out. What is the matter?"

"His Eminence sent me. The Prince has just felt unwell on rising from table. Oh! it's nothing — nothing serious, no doubt."

Benedetta raised a cry of surprise rather than anxiety: "What, Dario! Well, we'll all go down. Come with me, Monsieur l'Abbé. He mustn't get ill if he is to take us for a drive!" Then, meeting Victorine on the stairs, she bade her follow. "Dario isn't well," she said. "You may be wanted."

They all four entered the spacious, antiquated, and simply furnished bed-room where the young Prince had lately been laid up for a whole month. It was reached by way of a small *salon*, and from an adjoining dressing-room a passage conducted to the Cardinal's apartments, the relatively small dining-room, bed-room, and study, which had been devised by subdividing one of the huge galleries of former days. In addition, the passage gave access to his Eminence's private chapel, a bare, uncarpeted, chairless room, where there was nothing beyond the painted, wooden altar, and the hard, cold tiles on which to kneel and pray.

On entering, Benedetta hastened to the bed where Dario was lying, still fully dressed. Near him, in fatherly fashion, stood Cardinal Boccanera, who, amidst

his dawning anxiety, retained his proud and lofty bearing — the calmness of a soul beyond reproach. “Why, what is the matter, Dario *mio*?” asked the young woman.

He smiled, eager to reassure her. One only noticed that he was very pale, with a look as of intoxication on his face.

“Oh! it’s nothing, mere giddiness,” he replied. “It’s just as if I had drunk too much. All at once things swam before my eyes, and I thought I was going to fall. And then I only had time to come and fling myself on the bed.”

Then he drew a long breath, as though talking exhausted him, and the Cardinal in his turn gave some details. “We had just finished our meal,” said he, “I was giving Don Vigilio some orders for this afternoon, and was about to rise when I saw Dario get up and reel. He wouldn’t sit down again, but came in here, staggering like a somnambulist, and fumbling at the doors to open them. We followed him without understanding. And I confess that I don’t yet comprehend it.”

So saying, the Cardinal punctuated his surprise by waving his arm towards the rooms, through which a gust of misfortune seemed to have suddenly swept. All the doors had remained wide open: the dressing-room could be seen, and then the passage, at the end of which appeared the dining-room, in a disorderly state, like an apartment suddenly vacated; the table still laid, the napkins flung here and there, and the chairs pushed back. As yet, however, there was no alarm.

Benedetta made the remark which is usually made in such cases: "I hope you haven't eaten anything which has disagreed with you."

The Cardinal, smiling, again waved his hand as if to attest the frugality of his table. "Oh!" said he, "there were only some eggs, some lamb cutlets, and a dish of sorrel—they couldn't have overloaded his stomach. I myself only drink water; he takes just a sip of white wine. No, no, the food has nothing to do with it."

"Besides, in that case his Eminence and I would also have felt indisposed," Don Vigilio made bold to remark.

Dario, after momentarily closing his eyes, opened them again, and once more drew a long breath, whilst endeavouring to laugh. "Oh, it will be nothing;" he said. "I feel more at ease already. I must get up and stir myself."

"In that case," said Benedetta, "this is what I had thought of. You will take Monsieur l'Abbé Froment and me for a long drive in the Campagna."

"Willingly. It's a nice idea. Victorine, help me."

Whilst speaking he had raised himself by means of one arm; but, before the servant could approach, a slight convulsion seized him, and he fell back again as if overcome by a fainting fit. It was the Cardinal, still standing by the bedside, who caught him in his arms, whilst the Contessina this time lost her head: "*Dio, Dio!* It has come on him again. Quick, quick, a doctor!"

"Shall I run for one?" asked Pierre, whom the scene was also beginning to upset.

"No, no, not you; stay with me. Victorine will go at once. She knows the address. Doctor Gior-dano, Victorine."

The servant hurried away, and a heavy silence fell on the room where the anxiety became more pronounced every moment. Benedetta, now quite pale, had again approached the bed, whilst the Cardinal looked down at Dario, whom he still held in his arms. And a terrible suspicion, vague, indeterminate as yet, had just awoke in the old man's mind: Dario's face seemed to him to be ashen, to wear that mask of terrified anguish which he had already remarked on the countenance of his dearest friend, Monsignor Gallo, when he had held him in his arms, in like manner, two hours before his death. There was also the same swoon and the same sensation of clasping a cold form whose heart ceases to beat. And above everything else there was in Boccanera's mind the same growing thought of poison, poison coming one knew not whence or how, but mysteriously striking down those around him with the suddenness of lightning. And for a long time he remained with his head bent over the face of his nephew, that last scion of his race, seeking, studying, and recognising the signs of the mysterious, implacable disorder which once already had rent his heart atwain.

But Benedetta addressed him in a low, entreating voice: "You will tire yourself, uncle. Let me take him a little, I beg you. Have no fear, I'll hold him very gently, he will feel that it is I, and perhaps that will rouse him."

At last the Cardinal raised his head and looked at

her, and allowed her to take his place after kissing her with distracted passion, his eyes the while full of tears—a sudden burst of emotion in which his great love for the young woman melted the stern frigidity which he usually affected. “Ah! my poor child, my poor child!” he stammered, trembling from head to foot like an oak-tree about to fall. Immediately afterwards, however, he mastered himself, and whilst Pierre and Don Vigilio, mute and motionless, regretted that they could be of no help, he walked slowly to and fro. Soon, moreover, that bed-chamber became too small for all the thoughts revolving in his mind, and he strayed first into the dressing-room and then down the passage as far as the dining-room. And again and again he went to and fro, grave and impassible, his head low, ever lost in the same gloomy reverie. What were the multitudinous thoughts stirring in the brain of that believer, that haughty Prince who had given himself to God and could do naught to stay inevitable Destiny? From time to time he returned to the bedside, observed the progress of the disorder, and then started off again at the same slow regular pace, disappearing and reappearing, carried along as it were by the monotonous alternations of forces which man cannot control. Possibly he was mistaken, possibly this was some mere indisposition at which the doctor would smile. One must hope and wait. And again he went off and again he came back; and amidst the heavy silence nothing more clearly bespoke the torture of anxious fear than the rhythmical footsteps of that tall old man who was thus awaiting Destiny.

The door opened, and Victorine came in breathless. "I found the doctor, here he is," she gasped.

With his little pink face and white curls, his discreet paternal bearing which gave him the air of an amiable prelate, Doctor Giordano came in smiling; but on seeing that room and all the anxious people waiting in it, he turned very grave, at once assuming the expression of profound respect for all ecclesiastical secrets which he had acquired by long practice among the clergy. And when he had glanced at the sufferer he let but a low murmur escape him: "What, again! Is it beginning again!"

He was probably alluding to the knife thrust for which he had recently tended Dario. Who could be thus relentlessly pursuing that poor and inoffensive young prince? However no one heard the doctor unless it were Benedetta, and she was so full of feverish impatience, so eager to be tranquillised, that she did not listen but burst into fresh entreaties: "Oh! doctor, pray look at him, examine him, tell us that it is nothing. It can't be anything serious, since he was so well and gay but a little while ago. It's nothing serious, is it?"

"You are right no doubt, Contessina, it can be nothing dangerous. We will see."

However, on turning round, Doctor Giordano perceived the Cardinal, who with regular, thoughtful footsteps had come back from the dining-room to place himself at the foot of the bed. And while bowing, the doctor doubtless detected a gleam of mortal anxiety in the dark eyes fixed upon his own, for he added nothing but began to examine Dario like

a man who realises that time is precious. And as his examination progressed the affable optimism which usually appeared upon his countenance gave place to ashen gravity, a covert terror which made his lips slightly tremble. It was he who had attended Monsignor Gallo when the latter had been carried off so mysteriously; it was he who for imperative reasons had then delivered a certificate stating the cause of death to be infectious fever; and doubtless he now found the same terrible symptoms as in that case, a leaden hue overspreading the sufferer's features, a stupor as of excessive intoxication; and, old Roman practitioner that he was, accustomed to sudden deaths, he realised that the *malaria* which kills was passing, that *malaria* which science does not yet fully understand, which may come from the putrescent exhalations of the Tiber unless it be but a name for the ancient poison of the legends.

As the doctor raised his head his glance again encountered the black eyes of the Cardinal, which never left him. "Signor Giordano," said his Eminence, "you are not over-anxious, I hope? It is only some case of indigestion, is it not?"

The doctor again bowed. By the slight quiver of the Cardinal's voice he understood how acute was the anxiety of that powerful man, who once more was stricken in his dearest affections.

"Your Eminence must be right," he said, "there's a bad digestion certainly. Such accidents sometimes become dangerous when fever supervenes. I need not tell your Eminence how thoroughly you may rely on my prudence and zeal." Then he broke off

and added in a clear professional voice: "We must lose no time; the Prince must be undressed. I should prefer to remain alone with him for a moment."

Whilst speaking in this way, however, Doctor Giordano detained Victorine, who would be able to help him, said he; should he need any further assistance he would take Giacomo. His evident desire was to get rid of the members of the family in order that he might have more freedom of action. And the Cardinal, who understood him, gently led Benedetta into the dining-room, whither Pierre and Don Vigilio followed.

When the doors had been closed, the most mournful and oppressive silence reigned in that dining-room, which the bright sun of winter filled with such delightful warmth and radiance. The table was still laid, its cloth strewn here and there with bread-crumbs; and a coffee cup had remained half full. In the centre stood the basket of figs, whose covering of leaves had been removed. However, only two or three of the figs were missing. And in front of the window was Tata, the female parrot, who had flown out of her cage and perched herself on her stand, where she remained, dazzled and enraptured, amidst the dancing dust of a broad yellow sunray. In her astonishment however, at seeing so many people enter, she had ceased to scream and smooth her feathers, and had turned her head the better to examine the newcomers with her round and scrutinising eye.

The minutes went by slowly amidst all the feverish anxiety as to what might be occurring in the neighbouring room. Don Vigilio had taken a corner seat

in silence, whilst Benedetta and Pierre, who had remained standing, preserved similar muteness, and immobility. But the Cardinal had reverted to that instinctive, lulling tramp by which he apparently hoped to quiet his impatience and arrive the sooner at the explanation for which he was groping through a tumultuous maze of ideas. And whilst his rhythmical footsteps resounded with mechanical regularity, dark fury was taking possession of his mind, exasperation at being unable to understand the why and wherefore of that sickness. As he passed the table he had twice glanced at the things lying on it in confusion, as if seeking some explanation from them. Perhaps the harm had been done by that unfinished coffee, or by that bread whose crumbs lay here and there, or by those cutlets, a bone of which remained? Then as for the third time he passed by, again glancing, his eyes fell upon the basket of figs, and at once he stopped, as if beneath the shock of a revelation. An idea seized upon him and mastered him, without any plan, however, occurring to him by which he might change his sudden suspicion into certainty. For a moment he remained puzzled with his eyes fixed upon the basket. Then he took a fig and examined it, but, noticing nothing strange, was about to put it back when Tata, the parrot, who was very fond of figs, raised a strident cry. And this was like a ray of light; the means of changing suspicion into certainty was found.

Slowly, with grave air and gloomy visage, the Cardinal carried the fig to the parrot and gave it to her without hesitation or regret. She was a very pretty bird,

the only being of the lower order of creation to which he had ever really been attached. Stretching out her supple, delicate form, whose silken feathers of dull green here and there assumed a pinky tinge in the sunlight, she took hold of the fig with her claws, then ripped it open with her beak. But when she had raked it she ate but little, and let all the rest fall upon the floor. Still grave and impassible, the Cardinal looked at her and waited. Quite three minutes went by, and then feeling reassured, he began to scratch the bird's poll, whilst she, taking pleasure in the caress, turned her neck and fixed her bright ruby eye upon her master. But all at once she sank back without even a flap of the wings, and fell like a bullet. She was dead, killed as by a thunderbolt.

Boccanera made but a gesture, raising both hands to heaven as if in horror at what he now knew. Great God! such a terrible crime, and such a fearful mistake, such an abominable trick of Destiny! No cry of grief came from him, but the gloom upon his face grew black and fierce. Yet there was a cry, a piercing cry from Benedetta, who like Pierre and Don Vigilio had watched the Cardinal with an astonishment which had changed into terror: "Poison! poison! Ah! Dario, my heart, my soul!"

But the Cardinal violently caught his niece by the wrist, whilst darting a suspicious glance at the two petty priests, the secretary and the foreigner, who were present: "Be quiet, be quiet!" said he.

She shook herself free, rebelling, frantic with rage and hatred: "Why should I be quiet!" she cried. "It is Prada's work, I shall denounce him, he shall

die as well! I tell you it is Prada, I know it, for yesterday Abbé Froment came back with him from Frascati in his carriage with that priest Santobono and that basket of figs! Yes, yes, I have witnesses, it is Prada, Prada!"

"No, no, you are mad, be quiet!" said the Cardinal, who had again taken hold of the young woman's hands and sought to master her with all his sovereign authority. He, who knew the influence which Cardinal Sanguinetti exercised over Santobono's excitable mind, had just understood the whole affair; no direct complicity but covert propulsion, the animal excited and then let loose upon the troublesome rival at the moment when the pontifical throne seemed likely to be vacant. The probability, the certainty of all this flashed upon Boccanera who, though some points remained obscure, did not seek to penetrate them. It was not necessary indeed that he should know every particular: the thing was as he said, since it was bound to be so. "No, no, it was not Prada," he exclaimed, addressing Benedetta. "That man can bear me no personal grudge, and I alone was aimed at, it was to me that those figs were given. Come, think it out! Only an unforeseen indisposition prevented me from eating the greater part of the fruit, for it is known that I am very fond of figs, and while my poor Dario was tasting them, I jested and told him to leave the finer ones for me to-morrow. Yes, the abominable blow was meant for me, and it is on him that it has fallen by the most atrocious of chances, the most monstrous of the follies of fate. Ah! Lord God, Lord God, have you then forsaken us!"

Tears came into the old man's eyes, whilst she still quivered and seemed unconvinced: "But you have no enemies, uncle," she said. "Why should that Santobono try to take your life?"

For a moment he found no fitting reply. With supreme grandeur he had already resolved to keep the truth secret. Then a recollection came to him, and he resigned himself to the telling of a lie: "Santobono's mind has always been somewhat unhinged," said he, "and I know that he has hated me ever since I refused to help him to get a brother of his, one of our former gardeners, out of prison. Deadly spite often has no more serious cause. He must have thought that he had reason to be revenged on me."

Thereupon Benedetta, exhausted, unable to argue any further, sank upon a chair with a despairing gesture: "Ah! God, God! I no longer know—and what matters it now that my Dario is in such danger? There's only one thing to be done, he must be saved. How long they are over what they are doing in that room—why does not Victorine come for us!"

The silence again fell, full of terror. Without speaking the Cardinal took the basket of figs from the table and carried it to a cupboard in which he locked it. Then he put the key in his pocket. No doubt, when night had fallen, he himself would throw the proofs of the crime into the Tiber. However, on coming back from the cupboard he noticed the two priests, who naturally had watched him; and with mingled grandeur and simplicity he said to them: "Gentlemen, I need not ask you to be discreet. There are scandals which we must spare the Church, which is

not, cannot be guilty. To deliver one of ourselves, even when he is a criminal, to the civil tribunals, often means a blow for the whole Church, for men of evil mind may lay hold of the affair and seek to impute the responsibility of the crime even to the Church itself. We therefore have but to commit the murderer to the hands of God, who will know more surely how to punish him. Ah! for my part, whether I be struck in my own person or whether the blow be directed against my family, my dearest affections, I declare in the name of the Christ who died upon the cross, that I feel neither anger, nor desire for vengeance, that I efface the murderer's name from my memory and bury his abominable act in the eternal silence of the grave."

Tall as he was, he seemed of yet loftier stature whilst with hand upraised he took that oath to leave his enemies to the justice of God alone; for he did not refer merely to Santobono, but to Cardinal Sanguinetti, whose evil influence he had divined. And amidst all the heroism of his pride, he was rent by tragic dolour at thought of the dark battle which was waged around the tiara, all the evil hatred and voracious appetite which stirred in the depths of the gloom. Then, as Pierre and Don Vigilio bowed to him as a sign that they would preserve silence, he almost choked with invincible emotion, a sob of loving grief which he strove to keep down rising to his throat, whilst he stammered: "Ah! my poor child, my poor child, the only scion of our race, the only love and hope of my heart! Ah! to die, to die like this!"

But Benedetta, again all violence, sprang up: "Die! Who, Dario? I won't have it! We'll nurse him,

we'll go back to him. We will take him in our arms and save him. Come, uncle, come at once! I won't, I won't, I won't have him die!"

She was going towards the door, and nothing would have prevented her from re-entering the bed-room, when, as it happened, Victorine appeared with a wild look on her face, for, despite her wonted serenity, all her courage was now exhausted. "The doctor begs madame and his Eminence to come at once, at once," said she.

Stupefied by all these things, Pierre did not follow the others, but lingered for a moment in the sunlit dining-room with Don Vigilio. What! poison? Poison as in the time of the Borgias, elegantly hidden away, served up with luscious fruit by a crafty traitor, whom one dared not even denounce! And he recalled the conversation on his way back from Frascati, and his Parisian scepticism with respect to those legendary drugs, which to his mind had no place save in the fifth acts of melodramas. Yet those abominable stories were true, those tales of poisoned knives and flowers, of prelates and even dilatory popes being suppressed by a drop or a grain of something administered to them in their morning chocolate. That passionate tragical Santobono was really a poisoner, Pierre could no longer doubt it, for a lurid light now illumined the whole of the previous day: there were the words of ambition and menace which had been spoken by Cardinal Sanguinetti, the eagerness to act in presence of the probable death of the reigning pope, the suggestion of a crime for the sake of the Church's salvation, then that priest with his little basket of figs

encountered on the road, then that basket carried for hours so carefully, so devoutly, on the priest's knees, that basket which now haunted Pierre like a nightmare, and whose colour, and odour, and shape he would ever recall with a shudder. Aye, poison, poison, there was truth in it; it existed and still circulated in the depths of the black world, amidst all the ravenous, rival longings for conquest and sovereignty.

And all at once the figure of Prada likewise arose in Pierre's mind. A little while previously, when Benedetto had so violently accused the Count, he, Pierre, had stepped forward to defend him and cry aloud what he knew, whence the poison had come, and what hand had offered it. But a sudden thought had made him shiver: though Prada had not devised the crime, he had allowed it to be perpetrated. Another memory darted keen like steel through the young priest's mind — that of the little black hen lying lifeless beside the shed, amidst the dismal surroundings of the *osteria*, with a tiny streamlet of violet blood trickling from her beak. And here again, Tata, the parrot, lay still soft and warm at the foot of her stand, with her beak stained by oozing blood. Why had Prada told that lie about a battle between two fowls? All the dim intricacy of passion and contention bewildered Pierre, he could not thread his way through it; nor was he better able to follow the frightful combat which must have been waged in that man's mind during the night of the ball. At the same time he could not again picture him by his side during their nocturnal walk towards the Boccanera mansion without shuddering, dimly divining what a frightful decision had been

taken before that mansion's door. Moreover, whatever the obscurities, whether Prada had expected that the Cardinal alone would be killed, or had hoped that some chance stroke of fate might avenge him on others, the terrible fact remained — he had known, he had been able to stay Destiny on the march, but had allowed it to go onward and blindly accomplish its work of death.

Turning his head Pierre perceived Don Vigilio still seated on the corner chair whence he had not stirred, and looking so pale and haggard that perhaps he also had swallowed some of the poison. "Do you feel unwell?" the young priest asked.

At first the secretary could not reply, for terror had gripped him at the throat. Then in a low voice he said: "No, no, I didn't eat any. Ah, Heaven, when I think that I so much wanted to taste them, and that merely deference kept me back on seeing that his Eminence did not take any!" Don Vigilio's whole body shivered at the thought that his humility alone had saved him; and on his face and his hands there remained the icy chill of death which had fallen so near and grazed him as it passed.

Then twice he heaved a sigh, and with a gesture of affright sought to brush the horrid thing away while murmuring: "Ah! Paparelli, Paparelli!"

Pierre, deeply stirred, and knowing what he thought of the train-bearer, tried to extract some information from him: "What do you mean?" he asked. "Do you accuse him too? Do you think they urged him on, and that it was they at bottom?"

The word Jesuits was not even spoken, but a big

black shadow passed athwart the gay sunlight of the dining-room, and for a moment seemed to fill it with darkness. "They! ah yes!" exclaimed Don Vigilio, "they are everywhere; it is always they! As soon as one weeps, as soon as one dies, they are mixed up in it. And this is intended for me too; I am quite surprised that I haven't been carried off." Then again he raised a dull moan of fear, hatred, and anger: "Ah! Paparelli, Paparelli!" And he refused to reply any further, but darted scared glances at the walls as if from one or another of them he expected to see the train-bearer emerge, with his wrinkled flabby face like that of an old maid, his furtive mouse-like trot, and his mysterious, invading hands which had gone expressly to bring the forgotten figs from the pantry and deposit them on the table.

At last the two priests decided to return to the bedroom, where perhaps they might be required; and Pierre on entering was overcome by the heart-rending scene which the chamber now presented. Doctor Giordano, suspecting poison, had for half an hour been trying the usual remedies, an emetic and then magnesia. Just then, too, he had made Victorine whip some whites of eggs in water. But the disorder was progressing with such lightning-like rapidity that all succour was becoming futile. Undressed and lying on his back, his bust propped up by pillows and his arms lying outstretched over the sheets, Dario looked quite frightful in the sort of painful intoxication which characterised that redoubtable and mysterious disorder to which already Monsignor Gallo and others had succumbed. The young man seemed to be stricken with

a sort of dizzy stupor, his eyes receded farther and farther into the depth of their dark sockets, whilst his whole face became withered, aged as it were, and covered with an earthy pallor. A moment previously he had closed his eyes, and the only sign that he still lived was the heaving of his chest induced by painful respiration. And leaning over his poor dying face stood Benedetta, sharing his sufferings, and mastered by such impotent grief that she also was unrecognisable, so white, so distracted by anguish, that it seemed as if death were gradually taking her at the same time as it was taking him.

In the recess by the window whither Cardinal Boccanera had led Doctor Giordano, a few words were exchanged in low tones. "He is lost, is he not?"

The doctor made the despairing gesture of one who is vanquished: "Alas! yes. I must warn your Eminence that in an hour all will be over."

A short interval of silence followed. "And the same malady as Gallo, is it not?" asked the Cardinal; and as the doctor trembling and averting his eyes did not answer he added: "At all events of an infectious fever!"

Giordano well understood what the Cardinal thus asked of him: silence, the crime for ever hidden away for the sake of the good renown of his mother, the Church. And there could be no loftier, no more tragical grandeur than that of this old man of seventy, still so erect and sovereign, who would neither suffer a slur to be cast upon his spiritual family, nor consent to his human family being dragged into the inevitable mire of a sensational murder trial. No, no, there must

be none of that, there must be silence, the eternal silence in which all becomes forgotten.

At last the doctor bowed with his gentle air of discretion. "Evidently, of an infectious fever as your Eminence so well says," he replied.

Two big tears then again appeared in Boccanera's eyes. Now that he had screened the Deity from attack in the person of the Church, his heart as a man again bled. He begged the doctor to make a supreme effort, to attempt the impossible; but, pointing to the dying man with trembling hands, Giordano shook his head. For his own father, his own mother he could have done nothing. Death was there. So why weary, why torture a dying man, whose sufferings he would only have increased? And then, as the Cardinal, finding the end so near at hand, thought of his sister Serafina, and lamented that she would not be able to kiss her nephew for the last time if she lingered at the Vatican, the doctor offered to fetch her in his carriage which was waiting below. It would not take him more than twenty minutes, said he, and he would be back in time for the end, should he then be needed.

Left to himself in the window recess the Cardinal remained there motionless for another moment. With eyes blurred by tears, he gazed towards heaven. And his quivering arms were suddenly raised in a gesture of ardent entreaty. O God, since the science of man was so limited and vain, since that doctor had gone off happy to escape the embarrassment of his impotence, O God, why not a miracle which should proclaim the splendour of Thy Almighty Power! A miracle, a

miracle! that was what the Cardinal asked from the depths of his believing soul, with the insistence, the imperious entreaty of a Prince of the Earth, who deemed that he had rendered considerable services to Heaven by dedicating his whole life to the Church. And he asked for that miracle in order that his race might be perpetuated, in order that its last male scion might not thus miserably perish, but be able to marry that fondly loved cousin, who now stood there all woe and tears. A miracle, a miracle for the sake of those two dear children! A miracle which would endow the family with fresh life: a miracle which would eternise the glorious name of Boccanera by enabling an innumerable posterity of valiant ones and faithful ones to spring from that young couple!

When the Cardinal returned to the centre of the room he seemed transfigured. Faith had dried his eyes, his soul had become strong and submissive, exempt from all human weakness. He had placed himself in the hands of God, and had resolved that he himself would administer extreme unction to Dario. With a gesture he summoned Don Vigilio and led him into the little room which served as a chapel, and the key of which he always carried. A cupboard had been contrived behind the altar of painted wood, and the Cardinal went to it to take both stole and surplice. The coffer containing the Holy Oils was likewise there, a very ancient silver coffer bearing the Boccanera arms. And on Don Vigilio following the Cardinal back into the bed-room they in turn pronounced the Latin words:

"*Pax huic domui.*"

"*Et omnibus habitantibus in ea.*"¹

Death was coming so fast and threatening, that all the usual preparations were perforce dispensed with. Neither the two lighted tapers, nor the little table covered with white cloth had been provided. And, in the same way, Don Vigilio the assistant, having failed to bring the Holy Water basin and sprinkler, the Cardinal, as officiating priest, could merely make the gesture of blessing the room and the dying man, whilst pronouncing the words of the ritual: "*Asperges me, Domine, hyssopo, et mundabor; lavabis me, et super nivem dealbabor.*"²

Benedetta on seeing the Cardinal appear carrying the Holy Oils, had with a long quiver fallen on her knees at the foot of the bed, whilst, somewhat farther away, Pierre and Victorine likewise knelt, overcome by the dolorous grandeur of the scene. And the dilated eyes of the Contessina, whose face was pale as snow, never quitted her Dario, whom she no longer recognised, so earthy was his face, its skin tanned and wrinkled like that of an old man. And it was not for their marriage which he so much desired that their uncle, the all-powerful Prince of the Church, was bringing the Sacrament, but for the supreme rupture, the end of all pride, Death which finishes off the haughtiest races, and sweeps them away, even as the wind sweeps the dust of the roads.

It was needful that there should be no delay, so the

¹ "Peace unto this house and unto all who dwell in it." — *Trans.*

² "Sprinkle me, Lord, with hyssop, and purify me; wash me, and make me whiter than snow." — *Trans.*

Cardinal promptly repeated the *Credo* in an undertone, "*Credo in unum Deum* —"

"*Amen*," responded Don Vigilio, who, after the prayers of the ritual, stammered the Litanies in order that Heaven might take pity on the wretched man who was about to appear before God, if God by a prodigy did not spare him.

Then, without taking time to wash his fingers, the Cardinal opened the case containing the Holy Oils, and limiting himself to one anointment, as is permissible in pressing cases, he deposited a single drop of the oil on Dario's parched mouth which was already withered by death. And in doing so he repeated the words of the formula, his heart all aglow with faith as he asked that the divine mercy might efface each and every sin that the young man had committed by either of his five senses, those five portals by which everlasting temptation assails the soul. And the Cardinal's fervour was also instinct with the hope that if God had smitten the poor sufferer for his offences, perhaps He would make His indulgence entire and even restore him to life as soon as He should have forgiven his sins. Life, O Lord, life in order that the ancient line of the Boccaneras might yet multiply and continue to serve Thee in battle and at the altar until the end of time!

For a moment the Cardinal remained with quivering hands, gazing at the mute face, the closed eyes of the dying man, and waiting for the miracle. But no sign appeared, not the faintest glimmer brightened that haggard countenance, nor did a sigh of relief come from the withered lips as Don Vigilio wiped

them with a little cotton wool. And the last prayer was said, and whilst the frightful silence fell once more the Cardinal, followed by his assistant, returned to the chapel. There they both knelt, the Cardinal plunging into ardent prayer upon the bare tiles. With his eyes raised to the brass crucifix upon the altar he saw nothing, heard nothing, but gave himself wholly to his entreaties, supplicating God to take him in place of his nephew, if a sacrifice were necessary, and yet clinging to the hope that so long as Dario retained a breath of life and he himself thus remained on his knees addressing the Deity, he might succeed in pacifying the wrath of Heaven. He was both so humble and so great. Would not accord surely be established between God and a Boccanera? The old palace might have fallen to the ground, he himself would not even have felt the toppling of its beams.

In the bed-room, however, nothing had yet stirred beneath the weight of tragic majesty which the ceremony had left there. It was only now that Dario raised his eyelids, and when on looking at his hands he saw them so aged and wasted the depths of his eyes kindled with an expression of immense regretfulness that life should be departing. Doubtless it was at this moment of lucidity amidst the kind of intoxication with which the poison overwhelmed him, that he for the first time realised his perilous condition. Ah! to die, amidst such pain, such physical degradation, what a revolting horror for that frivolous and egotistical man, that lover of beauty, joy, and light, who knew not how to suffer! In him ferocious fate chastised racial degeneracy with too heavy a

hand. He became horrified with himself, seized with childish despair and terror, which lent him strength enough to sit up and gaze wildly about the room, in order to see if every one had not abandoned him. And when his eyes lighted on Benedetta still kneeling at the foot of the bed, a supreme impulse carried him towards her, he stretched forth both arms as passionately as his strength allowed and stammered her name: "O Benedetta, Benedetta!"

She, motionless in the stupor of her anxiety, had not taken her eyes from his face. The horrible disorder which was carrying off her lover, seemed also to possess and annihilate her more and more, even as he himself grew weaker and weaker. Her features were assuming an immaterial whiteness; and through the void of her clear eyeballs one began to espy her soul. However, when she perceived him thus resuscitating and calling her with arms outstretched, she in her turn arose and standing beside the bed made answer: "I am coming, my Dario, here I am."

And then Pierre and Victorine, still on their knees, beheld a sublime deed of such extraordinary grandeur that they remained rooted to the floor, spell-bound as in the presence of some supra-terrestrial spectacle in which human beings may not intervene. Benedetta herself spoke and acted like one freed from all social and conventional ties, already beyond life, only seeing and addressing beings and things from a great distance, from the depths of the unknown in which she was about to disappear.

"Ah! my Dario, so an attempt has been made to part us! It was in order that I might never belong

to you—that we might never be happy, that your death was resolved upon, and it was known that with your life my own must cease! And it is that man who is killing you! Yes, he is your murderer, even if the actual blow has been dealt by another. He is the first cause—he who stole me from you when I was about to become yours, he who ravaged our lives, and who breathed around us the hateful poison which is killing us. Ah! how I hate him, how I hate him; how I should like to crush him with my hate before I die with you!”

She did not raise her voice, but spoke those terrible words in a deep murmur, simply and passionately. Prada was not even named, and she scarcely turned towards Pierre—who knelt, paralysed, behind her—to add with a commanding air: “You will see his father, I charge you to tell him that I cursed his son! That kind-hearted hero loved me well—I love him even now, and the words you will carry to him from me will rend his heart. But I desire that he should know—he must know, for the sake of truth and justice.”

Distracted by terror, sobbing amidst a last convulsion, Dario again stretched forth his arms, feeling that she was no longer looking at him, that her clear eyes were no longer fixed upon his own: “Benedetta, Benedetta!”

“I am coming, I am coming, my Dario—I am here!” she responded, drawing yet nearer to the bedside and almost touching him. “Ah!” she went on, “that vow which I made to the Madonna to belong to none, not even you, until God should allow it by

the blessing of one of his priests! Ah! I set a noble, a divine pride in remaining immaculate for him who should be the one master of my soul and body. And that chastity which I was so proud of, I defended it against the other as one defends oneself against a wolf, and I defended it against you with tears for fear of sacrilege. And if you only knew what terrible struggles I was forced to wage with myself, for I loved you and longed to be yours, like a woman who accepts the whole of love, the love that makes wife and mother! Ah! my vow to the Madonna—with what difficulty did I keep it when the old blood of our race arose in me like a tempest; and now what a disaster!” She drew yet nearer, and her low voice became more ardent: “You remember that evening when you came back with a knife-thrust in your shoulder. I thought you dead, and cried aloud with rage at the idea of losing you like that. I insulted the Madonna and regretted that I had not damned myself with you that we might die together, so tightly clasped that we must needs be buried together also. And to think that such a terrible warning was of no avail! I was blind and foolish; and now you are again stricken, again being taken from my love. . . . Ah! my wretched pride, my idiotic dream!”

That which now rang out in her stifled voice was the anger of the practical woman that she had ever been, all superstition notwithstanding. Could the Madonna, who was so maternal, desire the woe of lovers? No, assuredly not. Nor did the angels make the mere absence of a priest a cause for weeping over the transports of true and mutual love. Was

not such love holy in itself, and did not the angels rather smile upon it and burst into gladsome song! And ah! how one cheated oneself by not loving to heart's content under the sun, when the blood of life coursed through one's veins!

"Benedetta! Benedetta!" repeated the dying man, full of child-like terror at thus going off all alone into the depths of the black and everlasting night.

"Here I am, my Dario, I am coming!"

Then, as she fancied that the servant, albeit motionless, had stirred, as if to rise and interfere, she added: "Leave me, leave me, Victorine, nothing in the world can henceforth prevent it. A moment ago, when I was on my knees, something roused me and urged me on. I know whither I am going. And besides, did I not swear on the night of the knife thrust? Did I not promise to belong to him alone, even in the earth if it were necessary? I must embrace him, and he will carry me away! We shall be dead, and we shall be wedded in spite of all, and for ever and for ever!"

She stepped back to the dying man, and touched him: "Here I am, my Dario, here I am!"

Then came the apogee. Amidst growing exaltation, buoyed up by a blaze of love, careless of glances, candid like a lily, she divested herself of her garments and stood forth so white, that neither marble statue, nor dove, nor snow itself was ever whiter. "Here I am, my Dario, here I am!"

Recoiling almost to the ground as at sight of an apparition, the glorious flash of a holy vision, Pierre and Victorine gazed at her with dazzled eyes. The

servant had not stirred to prevent this extraordinary action, seized as she was with that shrinking reverential terror which comes upon one in presence of the wild, mad deeds of faith and passion. And the priest, whose limbs were paralysed, felt that something so sublime was passing that he could only quiver in distraction. And no thought of impurity came to him on beholding that lily, snowy whiteness. All candour and all nobility as she was, that virgin shocked him no more than some sculptured masterpiece of genius.

“Here I am, my Dario, here I am.”

She had lain herself down beside the spouse whom she had chosen, she had clasped the dying man whose arms only had enough strength left to fold themselves around her. Death was stealing him from her, but she would go with him; and again she murmured: “My Dario, here I am.”

And at that moment, against the wall at the head of the bed, Pierre perceived the escutcheon of the Boccaneras, embroidered in gold and coloured silks on a groundwork of violet velvet. There was the winged dragon belching flames, there was the fierce and glowing motto “*Bocca nera, Alma rossa*” (black mouth, red soul), the mouth darkened by a roar, the soul flaming like a brazier of faith and love. And behold! all that old race of passion and violence with its tragic legends had reappeared, its blood bubbling up afresh to urge that last and adorable daughter of the line to those terrifying and prodigious nuptials in death. And to Pierre that escutcheon recalled another memory, that of the portrait of Cassia Boccanera the *amerosa* and

avengeress who had flung herself into the Tiber with her brother Ercole and the corpse of her lover Flavio. Was there not here even with Benedetta the same despairing clasp seeking to vanquish death, the same savagery in hurling oneself into the abyss with the corpse of the one's only love? Benedetta and Cassia were as sisters, Cassia, who lived anew in the old painting in the *salon* overhead, Benedetta who was here dying of her lover's death, as though she were but the other's spirit. Both had the same delicate childish features, the same mouth of passion, the same large dreamy eyes set in the same round, practical, and stubborn head.

"My Dario, here I am!"

For a second, which seemed an eternity, they clasped one another, she neither repelled nor terrified by the disorder which made him so unrecognisable, but displaying a delirious passion, a holy frenzy as if to pass beyond life, to penetrate with him into the black Unknown. And beneath the shock of the felicity at last offered to him he expired, with his arms yet convulsively wound around her as though indeed to carry her off. Then, whether from grief or from bliss amidst that embrace of death, there came such a rush of blood to her heart that the organ burst: she died on her lover's neck, both tightly and for ever clasped in one another's arms.

There was a faint sigh. Victorine understood and drew near, while Pierre, also erect, remained quivering with the tearful admiration of one who has beheld the sublime.

"Look, look!" whispered the servant, "she no

longer moves, she no longer breathes. Ah! my poor child, my poor child, she is dead!"

Then the priest murmured: "Oh! God, how beautiful they are."

It was true, never had loftier and more resplendent beauty appeared on the faces of the dead. Dario's countenance, so lately aged and earthen, had assumed the pallor and nobility of marble, its features lengthened and simplified as by a transport of ineffable joy. Benedetta remained very grave, her lips curved by ardent determination, whilst her whole face was expressive of dolorous yet infinite beatitude in a setting of infinite whiteness. Their hair mingled, and their eyes, which had remained open, continued gazing as into one another's souls with eternal, caressing sweetness. They were for ever linked, soaring into immortality amidst the enchantment of their union, vanquishers of death, radiant with the rapturous beauty of love, the conqueror, the immortal.

But Victorine's sobs at last burst forth, mingled with such lamentations that great confusion followed. Pierre, now quite beside himself, in some measure failed to understand how it was that the room suddenly became invaded by terrified people. The Cardinal and Don Vigilio, however, must have hastened in from the chapel; and at the same moment, no doubt, Doctor Giordano must have returned with Donna Serafina, for both were now there, she stupefied by the blows which had thus fallen on the house in her absence, whilst he, the doctor, displayed the perturbation and astonishment which comes upon the oldest practitioners when facts seem to give the lie to

their experience. However, he sought an explanation of Benedetta's death, and hesitatingly ascribed it to aneurism, or possibly embolism.

Thereupon Victorine, like a servant whose grief makes her the equal of her employers, boldly interrupted him: "Ah! sir," said she, "they loved each other too fondly; did not that suffice for them to die together?"

Meantime Donna Serafina, after kissing the poor children on the brow, desired to close their eyes; but she could not succeed in doing so, for the lids lifted directly she removed her finger and once more the eyes began to smile at one another, to exchange in all fixity their loving and eternal glance. And then as she spoke of parting the bodies, Victorine again protested: "Oh! madame, oh! madame," she said, "you would have to break their arms. Cannot you see that their fingers are almost dug into one another's shoulders? No, they can never be parted!"

Thereupon Cardinal Boccanera intervened. God had not granted the miracle; and he, His minister, was livid, tearless, and full of icy despair. But he waved his arm with a sovereign gesture of absolution and sanctification, as if, Prince of the Church that he was, disposing of the will of Heaven, he consented that the lovers should appear in that embrace before the supreme tribunal. In presence of such wondrous love, indeed, profoundly stirred by the sufferings of their lives and the beauty of their death, he showed a broad and lofty contempt for mundane proprieties. "Leave them, leave me, my sister," said he, "do not disturb their slumber. Let their eyes remain

open since they desire to gaze on one another till the end of time without ever wearying. And let them sleep in one another's arms since in their lives they did not sin, and only locked themselves in that embrace in order that they might be laid together in the ground."

And then, again becoming a Roman Prince whose proud blood was yet hot with old-time deeds of battle and passion, he added: "Two Boccaneras may well sleep like that; all Rome will admire them and weep for them. Leave them, leave them together, my sister. God knows them and awaits them!"

All knelt, and the Cardinal himself repeated the prayers for the dead. Night was coming, increasing gloom stole into the chamber, where two burning tapers soon shone out like stars.

And then, without knowing how, Pierre again found himself in the little deserted garden on the bank of the Tiber. Suffocating with fatigue and grief, he must have come thither for fresh air. Darkness shrouded the charming nook where the streamlet of water falling from the tragic mask into the ancient sarcophagus ever sang its shrill and flute-like song; and the laurel-bush which shaded it, and the bitter box-plants and the orange-trees skirting the paths now formed but vague masses under the blue-black sky. Ah! how gay and sweet had that melancholy garden been in the morning, and what a desolate echo it retained of Benedetta's winsome laughter, all that fine delight in coming happiness which now lay prone upstairs, steeped in the nothingness of things and beings! So dolorous was the pang which came to

Pierre's heart that he burst into sobs, seated on the same broken column where she had sat, and encompassed by the same atmosphere that she had breathed, in which still lingered the perfume of her presence.

But all at once a distant clock struck six, and the young priest started on remembering that he was to be received by the Pope that very evening at nine. Yet three more hours! He had not thought of that interview during the terrifying catastrophe, and it seemed to him now as if months and months had gone by, as if the appointment were some very old one which a man is only able to keep after years of absence, when he has grown aged and had his heart and brain modified by innumerable experiences. However, he made an effort and rose to his feet. In three hours' time he would go to the Vatican and at last he would see the Pope.

XIV

THAT evening, when Pierre emerged from the Borgo in front of the Vatican, a sonorous stroke rang out from the clock amidst the deep silence of the dark and sleepy district. It was only half-past eight, and being in advance the young priest resolved to wait some twenty minutes in order to reach the doors of the papal apartments precisely at nine, the hour fixed for his audience.

This respite brought him some relief amidst the infinite emotion and grief which gripped his heart. That tragic afternoon which he had spent in the chamber of death, where Dario and Benedetta now slept the eternal sleep in one another's arms, had left him very weary. He was haunted by a wild, dolorous vision of the two lovers, and involuntary sighs came from his lips whilst tears continually moistened his eyes. He had been altogether unable to eat that evening. Ah! how he would have liked to hide himself and weep at his ease! His heart melted at each fresh thought. The pitiful death of the lovers intensified the grievous feeling with which his book was instinct, and impelled him to yet greater compassion, a perfect anguish of charity for all who suffered in the world. And he was so distracted by the thought of the many physical and moral sores of Paris and

of Rome, where he had beheld so much unjust and abominable suffering, that at each step he took he feared lest he should burst into sobs with arms outstretched towards the blackness of heaven.

In the hope of somewhat calming himself he began to walk slowly across the Piazza of St. Peter's, now all darkness and solitude. On arriving he had fancied that he was losing himself in a murky sea, but by degrees his eyes grew accustomed to the dimness. The vast expanse was only lighted by the four candelabra at the corners of the obelisk and by infrequent lamps skirting the buildings which run on either hand towards the Basilica. Under the colonnade, too, other lamps threw yellow gleams across the forest of pillars, showing up their stone trunks in fantastic fashion; while on the piazza only the pale, ghostly obelisk was at all distinctly visible. Pierre could scarcely perceive the dim, silent façade of St. Peter's; whilst of the dome he merely divined a gigantic, bluey roundness faintly shadowed against the sky. In the obscurity he at first heard the plashing of the fountains without being at all able to see them, but on approaching he at last distinguished the slender phantoms of the ever rising jets which fell again in spray. And above the vast square stretched the vast and moonless sky of a deep velvety blue, where the stars were large and radiant like carbuncles; Charles's Wain, with golden wheels and golden shaft tilted back as it were, over the roof of the Vatican, and Orion, bedizened with the three bright stars of his belt, showing magnificently above Rome, in the direction of the Via Giulia.

At last Pierre raised his eyes to the Vatican, but facing the piazza there was here merely a confused jumble of walls, amidst which only two gleams of light appeared on the floor of the papal apartments. The Court of San Damaso was, however, lighted, for the conservatory-like glass-work of two of its sides sparkled as with the reflection of gas lamps which could not be seen. For a time there was not a sound or sign of movement, but at last two persons crossed the expanse of the piazza, and then came a third who in his turn disappeared, nothing remaining but a rhythmical far-away echo of steps. The spot was indeed a perfect desert, there were neither promenaders nor passers-by, nor was there even the shadow of a prowler in the pillared forest of the colonnade, which was as empty as the wild primeval forests of the world's infancy. And what a solemn desert it was, full of the silence of haughty desolation. Never had so vast and black a presentment of slumber, so instinct with the sovereign nobility of death, appeared to Pierre.

At ten minutes to nine he at last made up his mind and went towards the bronze portal. Only one of the folding doors was now open at the end of the right-hand porticus, where the increasing density of the gloom steeped everything in night. Pierre remembered the instructions which Monsignor Nani had given him; at each door that he reached he was to ask for Signor Squadra without adding a word, and thereupon each door would open and he would have nothing to do but to let himself be guided on. No one but the prelate now knew that he was there, since

Benedetta, the only being to whom he had confided the secret, was dead. When he had crossed the threshold of the bronze doors and found himself in presence of the motionless, sleeping Swiss Guard, who was on duty there, he simply spoke the words agreed upon: "Signor Squadra." And as the Guard did not stir, did not seek to bar his way, he passed on, turning into the vestibule of the Scala Pia, the stone stairway which ascends to the Court of San Damaso. And not a soul was to be seen: there was but the faint sound of his own light footsteps and the sleepy glow of the gas jets whose light was softly whitened by globes of frosted glass. Up above, on reaching the courtyard he found it a solitude, whose slumber seemed sepulchral amidst the mournful gleams of the gas lamps which cast a pallid reflection on the lofty glass-work of the façades. And feeling somewhat nervous, affected by the quiver which pervaded all that void and silence, Pierre hastened on, turning to the right, towards the low flight of steps which leads to the staircase of the Pope's private apartments.

Here stood a superb gendarme in full uniform. "Signor Squadra," said Pierre, and without a word the gendarme pointed to the stairs.

The young man went up. It was a broad stairway, with low steps, balustrade of white marble, and walls covered with yellowish stucco. The gas, burning in globes of round glass, seemed to have been already turned down in a spirit of prudent economy. And in the glimmering light nothing could have been more mournfully solemn than that cold and pallid

staircase. On each landing there was a Swiss Guard, halbard in hand, and in the heavy slumber spreading through the palace one only heard the regular monotonous footsteps of these men, ever marching up and down, in order no doubt that they might not succumb to the benumbing influence of their surroundings.

Amidst the invading dimness and the quivering silence the ascent of the stairs seemed interminable to Pierre, who by the time he reached the second-floor landing imagined that he had been climbing for ages. There, outside the glass door of the Sala Clementina, only the right-hand half of which was open, a last Swiss Guard stood watching.

"Signor Squadra," Pierre said again, and the Guard drew back to let him pass.

The Sala Clementina, spacious enough by daylight, seemed immense at that nocturnal hour, in the twilight glimmer of its lamps. All the opulent decorative-work, sculpture, painting, and gilding became blended, the walls assuming a tawny vagueness amidst which appeared bright patches like the sparkle of precious stones. There was not an article of furniture, nothing but the endless pavement stretching away into the semi-darkness. At last, however, near a door at the far end Pierre espied some men dozing on a bench. They were three Swiss Guards. "Signor Squadra," he said to them.

One of the Guards thereupon slowly rose and left the hall, and Pierre understood that he was to wait. He did not dare to move, disturbed as he was by the sound of his own footsteps on the paved floor, so he contented himself with gazing around and picturing

the crowds which at times peopled that vast apartment, the first of the many papal ante-chambers. But before long the Guard returned, and behind him, on the threshold of the adjoining room, appeared a man of forty or thereabouts, who was clad in black from head to foot and suggested a cross between a butler and a beadle. He had a good-looking, clean-shaven face, with somewhat pronounced nose and large, clear, fixed eyes. "Signor Squadra," said Pierre for the last time.

The man bowed as if to say that he was Signor Squadra, and then, with a fresh reverence, he invited the priest to follow him. Thereupon at a leisurely step, one behind the other, they began to thread the interminable suite of waiting-rooms. Pierre, who was acquainted with the ceremonial, of which he had often spoken with Narcisse, recognised the different apartments as he passed through them, recalling their names and purpose, and peopling them in imagination with the various officials of the papal retinue who have the right to occupy them. These according to their rank cannot go beyond certain doors, so that the persons who are to have audience of the Pope are passed on from the servants to the Noble Guards, from the Noble Guards to the honorary *Camerieri*, and from the latter to the *Camerieri segreti*, until they at last reach the presence of the Holy Father. At eight o'clock, however, the ante-rooms empty and become both deserted and dim, only a few lamps being left alight upon the pier tables standing here and there against the walls.

And first Pierre came to the ante-room of the

bussolanti, mere ushers clad in red velvet brodered with the papal arms, who conduct visitors to the door of the ante-room of honour. At that late hour only one of them was left there, seated on a bench in such a dark corner that his purple tunic looked quite black. Then the Hall of the Gendarmes was crossed, where according to the regulations the secretaries of cardinals and other high personages await their masters' return; and this was now completely empty, void both of the handsome blue uniforms with white shoulder belts and the cassocks of fine black cloth which mingled in it during the brilliant reception hours. Empty also was the following room, a smaller one reserved to the Palatine Guards, who are recruited among the Roman middle class and wear black tunics with gold epaulets and shakoes surmounted by red plumes. Then Pierre and his guide turned into another series of apartments, and again was the first one empty. This was the Hall of the Arras, a superb waiting-room with lofty painted ceiling and admirable Gobelins tapestry designed by Audran and representing the miracles of Jesus. And empty also was the ante-chamber of the Noble Guards which followed, with its wooden stools, its pier table on the right-hand surmounted by a large crucifix standing between two lamps, and its large door opening at the far end into another but smaller room, a sort of alcove indeed, where there is an altar at which the Holy Father says mass by himself whilst those privileged to be present remain kneeling on the marble slabs of the outer apartment which is resplendent with the dazzling uniforms of the Guards. And empty likewise was the ensuing ante-room of honour, other-

wise the grand throne-room, where the Pope receives two or three hundred people at a time in public audience. The throne, an arm-chair of elaborate pattern, gilded, and upholstered with red velvet, stands under a velvet canopy of the same hue, in front of the windows. Beside it is the cushion on which the Pope rests his foot in order that it may be kissed. Then facing one another, right and left of the room, there are two pier tables, on one of which is a clock and on the other a crucifix between lofty candelabra with feet of gilded wood. The wall hangings, of red silk damask with a Louis XIV palm pattern, are topped by a pompous frieze, framing a ceiling decorated with allegorical figures and attributes, and it is only just in front of the throne that a Smyrna carpet covers the magnificent marble pavement. On the days of private audience, when the Pope remains in the little throne-room or at times in his bed-chamber, the grand throne-room becomes simply the ante-room of honour, where high dignitaries of the Church, ambassadors, and great civilian personages, wait their turns. Two *Camerieri*, one in violet coat, the other of the Cape and the Sword, here do duty, receiving from the *bussolanti* the persons who are to be honoured with audiences and conducting them to the door of the next room, the secret or private ante-chamber, where they hand them over to the *Camerieri segreti*.

Signor Squadra who, walking on with slow and silent steps, had not yet once turned round, paused for a moment on reaching the door of the *anticamera segreta* so as to give Pierre time to breathe and recover himself somewhat before crossing the threshold of the

sanctuary. The *Camerieri segreti* alone had the right to occupy that last ante-chamber, and none but the cardinals might wait there till the Pope should condescend to receive them. And so when Signor Squadra made up his mind to admit Pierre, the latter could not restrain a slight nervous shiver as if he were passing into some redoubtable mysterious sphere beyond the limits of the lower world. In the daytime a Noble Guard stood on sentry duty before the door, but the latter was now free of access, and the room within proved as empty as all the others. It was rather narrow, almost like a passage, with two windows overlooking the new district of the castle fields and a third one facing the Piazza of St. Peter's. Near the last was a door conducting to the little throne-room, and between this door and the window stood a small table at which a secretary, now absent, usually sat. And here again, as in all the other rooms, one found a gilded pier table surmounted by a crucifix flanked by a pair of lamps. In a corner too there was a large clock, loudly ticking in its ebony case incrustated with brass-work. Still there was nothing to awaken curiosity under the panelled and gilded ceiling unless it were the wall-hangings of red damask, on which yellow scutcheons displaying the Keys and the Tiara alternated with armorial lions, each with a paw resting on a globe.

Signor Squadra, however, now noticed that Pierre still carried his hat in his hand, whereas according to etiquette he should have left it in the hall of the *bussolanti*, only cardinals being privileged to carry their hats with them into the Pope's presence.

Accordingly he discreetly took the young priest's from him, and deposited it on the pier table to indicate that it must at least remain there. Then, without a word, by a simple bow he gave Pierre to understand that he was about to announce him to his Holiness, and that he must be good enough to wait for a few minutes in that room.

On being left to himself Pierre drew a long breath. He was stifling; his heart was beating as though it would burst. Nevertheless his mind remained clear, and in spite of the semi-obscurity he had been able to form some idea of the famous and magnificent apartments of the Pope, a suite of splendid *salons* with tapestried or silken walls, gilded or painted friezes, and frescoed ceilings. By way of furniture, however, there were only pier table, stools,¹ and thrones. And the lamps and the clocks, and the crucifixes, even the thrones, were all presents brought from the four quarters of the world in the great fervent days of jubilee. There was no sign of comfort, everything was pompous, stiff, cold, and inconvenient. All olden Italy was there, with its perpetual display and lack of intimate, cosy life. It had been necessary to lay a few carpets over the superb marble slabs which froze one's feet; and some *calorifères* had even lately been installed, but it was not thought prudent to light them lest the variations of temperature should give the Pope a cold. However, that which

¹ M. Zola seems to have fallen into error here. Many of the seats, which are of peculiar antique design, do, in the lower part, resemble stools, but they have backs, whereas a stool proper has none. Briefly, these seats, which are entirely of wood, are not unlike certain old-fashioned hall chairs. — *Trans.*

more particularly struck Pierre now that he stood there waiting was the extraordinary silence which prevailed all around, silence so deep that it seemed as if all the dark quiescence of that huge, somniferous Vatican were concentrated in that one suite of lifeless, sumptuous rooms, which the motionless flamelets of the lamps as dimly illumined.

All at once the ebony clock struck nine and the young man felt astonished. What! had only ten minutes elapsed since he had crossed the threshold of the bronze doors below? He felt as if he had been walking on for days and days. Then, desiring to overcome the nervous feeling which oppressed him — for he ever feared lest his enforced calmness should collapse amidst a flood of tears — he began to walk up and down, passing in front of the clock, glancing at the crucifix on the pier table, and the globe of the lamp on which had remained the mark of a servant's greasy fingers. And the light was so faint and yellow that he felt inclined to turn the lamp up, but did not dare. Then he found himself with his brow resting against one of the panes of the window facing the Piazza of St. Peter's, and for a moment he was thunderstruck, for between the imperfectly closed shutters he could see all Rome, as he had seen it one day from the *loggie* of Raffaele, and as he had pictured Leo XIII contemplating it from the window of his bed-room. However, it was now Rome by night, Rome spreading out into the depths of the gloom, as limitless as the starry sky. And in that sea of black waves one could only with certainty identify the larger thoroughfares which the white brightness of

electric lights turned, as it were, into 'Milky Ways. All the rest showed but a swarming of little yellow sparks, the crumbs, as it were, of a half-extinguished heaven swept down upon the earth. Occasional constellations of bright stars, tracing mysterious figures, vainly endeavoured to show forth distinctly, but they were submerged, blotted out by the general chaos which suggested the dust of some old planet that had crumbled there, losing its splendour and reduced to mere phosphorescent sand. And how immense was the blackness thus sprinkled with light, how huge the mass of obscurity and mystery into which the Eternal City with its seven and twenty centuries, its ruins, its monuments, its people, its history seemed to have been merged. You could no longer tell where it began or where it ended, whether it spread to the farthest recesses of the gloom, or whether it were so reduced that the sun on rising would illumine but a little pile of ashes.

However, in spite of all Pierre's efforts, his nervous anguish increased each moment, even in presence of that ocean of darkness which displayed such sovereign quiescence. He drew away from the window and quivered from head to foot on hearing a faint foot-fall and thinking it was that of Signor Squadra approaching to fetch him. The sound came from an adjacent apartment, the little throne-room, whose door, he now perceived, had remained ajar. And at last, as he heard nothing further, he yielded to his feverish impatience and peeped into this room which he found to be fairly spacious, again hung with red damask, and containing a gilded arm-chair, covered

with red velvet under a canopy of the same material. And again there was the inevitable pier table, with a tall ivory crucifix, a clock, a pair of lamps, a pair of candelabra, a pair of large vases on pedestals, and two smaller ones of Sèvres manufacture decorated with the Holy Father's portrait. At the same time, however, the room displayed rather more comfort, for a Smyrna carpet covered the whole of the marble floor, while a few arm-chairs stood against the walls, and an imitation chimney-piece, draped with damask, served as counterpart to the pier table. As a rule the Pope, whose bed-chamber communicated with this little throne-room, received in the latter such persons as he desired to honour. And Pierre's shiver became more pronounced at the idea that in all likelihood he would merely have the throne-room to cross and that Leo XIII was yonder behind its farther door. Why was he kept waiting, he wondered? He had been told of mysterious audiences granted at a similar hour to personages who had been received in similar silent fashion, great personages whose names were only mentioned in the lowest whispers. With regard to himself no doubt, it was because he was considered compromising that there was a desire to receive him in this manner unknown to the personages of the Court, and so as to speak with him at ease. Then, all at once, he understood the cause of the noise he had recently heard, for beside the lamp on the pier table of the little throne-room he saw a kind of butler's tray containing some soiled plates, knives, forks, and spoons, with a bottle and a glass, which had evidently just been removed from a supper table. And he realised

that Signor Squadra, having seen these things in the Pope's room, had brought them there, and had then gone in again, perhaps to tidy up. He knew also of the Pope's frugality, how he took his meals all alone at a little round table, everything being brought to him in that tray, a plate of meat, a plate of vegetables, a little Bordeaux claret as prescribed by his doctor, and a large allowance of beef broth of which he was very fond. In the same way as others might offer a cup of tea, he was wont to offer cups of broth to the old cardinals his friends and favourites, quite an invigorating little treat which these old bachelors much enjoyed. And, O ye orgies of Alexander VI, ye banquets and *galas* of Julius II and Leo X, only eight *lire* a day — six shillings and fourpence — were allowed to defray the cost of Leo XIII's table! However, just as that recollection occurred to Pierre, he again heard a slight noise, this time in his Holiness's bed-chamber, and thereupon, terrified by his indiscretion, he hastened to withdraw from the entrance of the throne-room which, lifeless and quiescent though it was, seemed in his agitation to flare as with sudden fire.

Then, quivering too violently to be able to remain still, he began to walk up and down the ante-chamber. He remembered that Narcisse had spoken to him of that Signor Squadra, his Holiness's cherished valet, whose importance and influence were so great. He alone, on reception days, was able to prevail on the Pope to don a clean cassock if the one he was wearing happened to be soiled by snuff. And though his Holiness stubbornly shut himself up alone in his bed-room

every night from a spirit of independence, which some called the anxiety of a miser determined to sleep alone with his treasure, Signor Squadra at all events occupied an adjoining chamber, and was ever on the watch, ready to respond to the faintest call. Again, it was he who respectfully intervened whenever his Holiness sat up too late or worked too long. But on this point it was difficult to induce the Pope to listen to reason. During his hours of insomnia he would often rise and send Squadra to fetch a secretary in order that he might detail some memoranda or sketch out an encyclical letter. When the drafting of one of the latter impassioned him he would have spent days and nights over it, just as formerly, when claiming proficiency in Latin verse, he had often let the dawn surprise him whilst he was polishing a line. But, indeed, he slept very little, his brain ever being at work, ever scheming out the realisation of some former ideas. His memory alone seemed to have slightly weakened during recent times.

Pierre, as he slowly paced to and fro, gradually became absorbed in his thoughts of that lofty and sovereign personality. From the petty details of the Pope's daily existence, he passed to his intellectual life, to the rôle which he was certainly bent on playing as a great pontiff. And Pierre asked himself which of his two hundred and fifty-seven predecessors, the long line of saints and criminals, men of mediocrity and men of genius, he most desired to resemble. Was it one of the first humble popes, those who followed on during the first three centuries, mere heads of burial guilds, fraternal pastors of the Christian

community? Was it Pope Damasus, the first great builder, the man of letters who took delight in intellectual matters, the ardent believer who is said to have opened the Catacombs to the piety of the faithful? Was it Leo III, who by crowning Charlemagne boldly consummated the rupture with the schismatic East and conveyed the Empire to the West by the all-powerful will of God and His Church, which thenceforth disposed of the crowns of monarchs? Was it the terrible Gregory VII, the purifier of the temple, the sovereign of kings; was it Innocent III or Boniface VIII, those masters of souls, nations, and thrones, who, armed with the fierce weapon of excommunication, reigned with such despotism over the terrified middle ages that Catholicism was never nearer the attainment of its dream of universal dominion? Was it Urban II or Gregory IX or another of those popes in whom flared the red Crusading passion which urged the nations on to the conquest of the unknown and the divine? Was it Alexander III, who defended the Holy See against the Empire, and at last conquered and set his foot on the neck of Frederick Barbarossa? Was it, long after the sorrows of Avignon, Julius II, who wore the cuirass and once more strengthened the political power of the papacy? Was it Leo X, the pompous, glorious patron of the Renaissance, of a whole great century of art, whose mind, however, was possessed of so little penetration and foresight that he looked on Luther as a mere rebellious monk? Was it Pius V, who personified dark and avenging reaction, the fire of the stakes that punished the heretic world? Was

it some other of the popes who reigned after the Council of Trent with faith absolute, belief re-established in its full integrity, the Church saved by pride and the stubborn upholding of every dogma? Or was it a pope of the decline, such as Benedict XIV, the man of vast intelligence, the learned theologian who, as his hands were tied, and he could not dispose of the kingdoms of the world, spent a worthy life in regulating the affairs of heaven?

In this wise, in Pierre's mind there spread out the whole history of the popes, the most prodigious of all histories, showing fortune in every guise, the lowest, the most wretched, as well as the loftiest and most dazzling; whilst an obstinate determination to live enabled the papacy to survive everything — conflagrations, massacres, and the downfall of many nations, for always did it remain militant and erect in the persons of its popes, that most extraordinary of all lines of absolute, conquering, and domineering sovereigns, every one of them — even the puny and humble — masters of the world, every one of them glorious with the imperishable glory of heaven when they were thus evoked in that ancient Vatican, where their spirits assuredly awoke at night and prowled about the endless galleries and spreading halls in that tomb-like silence whose quiver came no doubt from the light touch of their gliding steps over the marble slabs.

However, Pierre was now thinking that he indeed knew which of the great popes Leo XIII most desired to resemble. It was first Gregory the Great, the conqueror and organiser of the early days of Catholic power. He had come of ancient Roman stock, and

in his heart there was a little of the blood of the emperors. He administered Rome after it had been saved from the Goths, cultivated the ecclesiastical domains, and divided earthly wealth into thirds, one for the poor, one for the clergy, and one for the Church. Then too he was the first to establish the Propaganda, sending his priests forth to civilise and pacify the nations, and carrying his conquests so far as to win Great Britain over to the divine law of Christ. And the second pope whom Leo XIII took as model was one who had arisen after a long lapse of centuries, Sixtus V, the pope financier and politician, the vine-dresser's son, who, when he had donned the tiara, revealed one of the most extensive and supple minds of a period fertile in great diplomatists. He heaped up treasure and displayed stern avarice, in order that he might ever have in his coffers all the money needful for war or for peace. He spent years and years in negotiations with kings, never despairing of his own triumph; and never did he display open hostility for his times, but took them as they were and then sought to modify them in accordance with the interests of the Holy See, showing himself conciliatory in all things and with every one, already dreaming of an European balance of power which he hoped to control. And withal a very saintly pope, a fervent mystic, yet a pope of the most absolute and domineering mind blended with a politician ready for whatever courses might most conduce to the rule of God's Church on earth.

And, after all, Pierre amidst his rising enthusiasm, which despite his efforts at calmness was sweeping

away all prudence and doubt, Pierre asked himself why he need question the past. Was not Leo XIII the pope whom he had depicted in his book, the great pontiff, who was desired and expected? No doubt the portrait which he had sketched was not accurate in every detail, but surely its main lines must be correct if mankind were to retain a hope of salvation. Whole pages of that book of his arose before him, and he again beheld the Leo XIII that he had portrayed, the wise and conciliatory politician, labouring for the unity of the Church and so anxious to make it strong and invincible against the day of the inevitable great struggle. He again beheld him freed from the cares of the temporal power, elevated, radiant with moral splendour, the only authority left erect above the nations; he beheld him realising what mortal danger would be incurred if the solution of the social question were left to the enemies of Christianity, and therefore resolving to intervene in contemporary quarrels for the defence of the poor and the lowly, even as Jesus had intervened once before. And he again beheld him putting himself on the side of the democracies, accepting the Republic in France, leaving the dethroned kings in exile, and verifying the prediction which promised the empire of the world to Rome once more when the papacy should have unified belief and have placed itself at the head of the people. The times indeed were near accomplishment, Cæsar was struck down, the Pope alone remained, and would not the people, the great silent multitude, for whom the two powers had so long contended, give itself to its Father now that it knew him to be both just and

charitable, with heart aglow and hand outstretched to welcome all the penniless toilers and beggars of the roads! Given the catastrophe which threatened our rotten modern societies, the frightful misery which ravaged every city, there was surely no other solution possible: Leo XIII, the predestined, necessary redeemer, the pastor sent to save the flock from coming disaster by re-establishing the true Christian community, the forgotten golden age of primitive Christianity. The reign of justice would at last begin, all men would be reconciled, there would be but one nation living in peace and obeying the equalising law of work, under the high patronage of the Pope, sole bond of charity and love on earth!

And at this thought Pierre was upbuoyed by fiery enthusiasm. At last he was about to see the Holy Father, empty his heart and open his soul to him! He had so long and so passionately looked for the advent of that moment! To secure it he had fought with all his courage through ever recurring obstacles, and the length and difficulty of the struggle and the success now at last achieved, increased his feverishness, his desire for final victory. Yes, yes, he would conquer, he would confound his enemies. As he had said to Monsignor Fornaro, could the Pope disavow him? Had he not expressed the Holy Father's secret ideas? Perhaps he might have done so somewhat prematurely, but was not that a fault to be forgiven? And then too, he remembered his declaration to Monsignor Nani, that he himself would never withdraw and suppress his book, for he neither regretted nor disowned anything that was in it. At this very mo-

ment he again questioned himself, and felt that all his valour and determination to defend his book, all his desire to work the triumph of his belief, remained intact. Yet his mental perturbation was becoming great, he had to seek for ideas, wondering how he should enter the Pope's presence, what he should say, what precise terms he should employ. Something heavy and mysterious which he could hardly account for seemed to weigh him down. At bottom he was weary, already exhausted, only held up by his dream, his compassion for human misery. However, he would enter in all haste, he would fall upon his knees and speak as he best could, letting his heart flow forth. And assuredly the Holy Father would smile on him, and dismiss him with a promise that he would not sign the condemnation of a work in which he had found the expression of his own most cherished thoughts.

Then, again, such an acute sensation as of fainting came over Pierre that he went up to the window to press his burning brow against the cold glass. His ears were buzzing, his legs staggering, whilst his brain throbbed violently. And he was striving to forget his thoughts by gazing upon the black immensity of Rome, longing to be steeped in night himself, total, healing night, the night in which one sleeps on for ever, knowing neither pain nor wretchedness, when all at once he became conscious that somebody was standing behind him; and thereupon, with a start, he turned round.

And there, indeed, stood Signor Squadra in his black livery. Again he made one of his customary bows to invite the visitor to follow him, and again he walked

on in front, crossing the little throne-room, and slowly opening the farther door. Then he drew aside, allowed Pierre to enter, and noiselessly closed the door behind him.

Pierre was in his Holiness's bed-room. He had feared one of those overwhelming attacks of emotion which madden or paralyse one. He had been told of women reaching the Pope's presence in a fainting condition, staggering as if intoxicated, while others came with a rush, as though upheld and borne along by invisible pinions. And suddenly the anguish of his own spell of waiting, his intense feverishness, ceased in a sort of astonishment, a reaction which rendered him very calm and so restored his clearness of vision, that he could see everything. As he entered he distinctly realised the decisive importance of such an audience, he, a mere petty priest in presence of the Supreme Pontiff, the Head of the Church. All his religious and moral life would depend on it; and possibly it was this sudden thought that thus chilled him on the threshold of the redoubtable sanctuary, which he had approached with such quivering steps, and which he would not have thought to enter otherwise than with distracted heart and loss of senses, unable to do more than stammer the simple prayers of childhood.

Later on, when he sought to classify his recollections he remembered that his eyes had first lighted on Leo XIII, not, however, to the exclusion of his surroundings, but in conjunction with them, that spacious room hung with yellow damask whose alcove, adorned with fluted marble columns, was so deep that the bed was quite hidden away in it, as well as other articles of

furniture, a couch, a wardrobe, and some trunks, those famous trunks in which the treasure of the Peter's Pence was said to be securely locked. A sort of Louis XIV writing-desk with ornaments of engraved brass stood face to face with a large gilded and painted Louis XV pier table on which a lamp was burning beside a lofty crucifix. The room was virtually bare, only three arm-chairs and four or five other chairs, upholstered in light silk, being disposed here and there over the well-worn carpet. And on one of the arm-chairs sat Leo XIII, near a small table on which another lamp with a shade had been placed. Three newspapers, moreover, lay there, two of them French and one Italian, and the last was half unfolded as if the Pope had momentarily turned from it to stir a glass of syrup, standing beside him, with a long silver-gilt spoon.

In the same way as Pierre saw the Pope's room, he saw his costume, his cassock of white cloth with white buttons, his white skull-cap, his white cape and his white sash fringed with gold and broidered at either end with golden keys. His stockings were white, his slippers were of red velvet, and these again were broidered with golden keys. What surprised the young priest, however, was his Holiness's face and figure, which now seemed so shrunken that he scarcely recognised them. This was his fourth meeting with the Pope. He had seen him walking in the Vatican gardens, enthroned in the Hall of Beatifications, and pontifying at St. Peter's, and now he beheld him on that arm-chair, in privacy, and looking so slight and fragile that he could not restrain a feeling of affec-

tionate anxiety. Leo's neck was particularly remarkable, slender beyond belief, suggesting the neck of some little, aged, white bird. And his face, of the pallor of alabaster, was characteristically transparent, to such a degree, indeed, that one could see the lamp-light through his large commanding nose, as if the blood had entirely withdrawn from that organ. A mouth of great length, with white bloodless lips, streaked the lower part of the papal countenance, and the eyes alone had remained young and handsome. Superb eyes they were, brilliant like black diamonds, endowed with sufficient penetration and strength to lay souls open and force them to confess the truth aloud. Some scanty white curls emerged from under the white skull-cap, thus whitely crowning the thin white face, whose ugliness was softened by all this whiteness, this spiritual whiteness in which Leo XIII's flesh seemed as it were but pure lily-white florescence.

At the first glance, however, Pierre noticed that if Signor Squadra had kept him waiting, it had not been in order to compel the Holy Father to don a clean cassock, for the one he was wearing was badly soiled by snuff. A number of brown stains had trickled down the front of the garment beside the buttons, and just like any good *bourgeois*, his Holiness had a handkerchief on his knees to wipe himself. Apart from all this he seemed in good health, having recovered from his recent indisposition as easily as he usually recovered from such passing illnesses, sober, prudent old man that he was, quite free from organic disease, and simply declining by reason of progressive natural exhaustion.

Immediately on entering Pierre had felt that the Pope's sparkling eyes, those two black diamonds, were fixed upon him. The silence was profound, and the lamps burned with motionless, pallid flames. He had to approach, and after making the three genuflections prescribed by etiquette, he stooped over one of the Pope's feet resting on a cushion in order to kiss the red velvet slipper. And on the Pope's side there was not a word, not a gesture, not a movement. When the young man drew himself up again he found the two black diamonds, those two eyes which were all brightness and intelligence, still riveted on him.

But at last Leo XIII, who had been unwilling to spare the young priest the humble duty of kissing his foot and who now left him standing, began to speak, whilst still examining him, probing, as it were, his very soul. "My son," he said, "you greatly desired to see me, and I consented to afford you that satisfaction."

He spoke in French, somewhat uncertain French, pronounced after the Italian fashion, and so slowly did he articulate each sentence that one could have written it down like so much dictation. And his voice, as Pierre had previously noticed, was strong and nasal, one of those full voices which people are surprised to hear coming from debile and apparently bloodless and breathless frames.

In response to the Holy Father's remark Pierre contented himself with bowing, knowing that respect required him to wait for a direct answer before speaking. However, this question promptly came. "You live in Paris?" asked Leo XIII.

"Yes, Holy Father."

"Are you attached to one of the great parishes of the city?"

"No, Holy Father. I simply officiate at the little church of Neuilly."

"Ah, yes, Neuilly, that is in the direction of the Bois de Boulogne, is it not? And how old are you, my son?"

"Thirty-four, Holy Father."

A short interval followed. Leo XIII had at last lowered his eyes. With frail, ivory hand he took up the glass beside him, again stirred the syrup with the long spoon, and then drank a little of it. And all this he did gently and slowly, with a prudent, judicious air, as was his wont no doubt in everything. "I have read your book, my son," he resumed. "Yes, the greater part of it. As a rule only fragments are submitted to me. But a person who is interested in you handed me the volume, begging me to glance through it. And that is how I was able to look into it."

As he spoke he made a slight gesture in which Pierre fancied he could detect a protest against the isolation in which he was kept by those surrounding him, who, as Monsignor Nani had said, maintained a strict watch in order that nothing they objected to might reach him. And thereupon the young priest ventured to say: "I thank your Holiness for having done me so much honour. No greater or more desired happiness could have befallen me." He was indeed so happy! On seeing the Pope so calm, so free from all signs of anger, and on hearing him speak in that way of his book, like one well acquainted with it, he imagined that his cause was won.

"You are in relations with Monsieur le Vicomte Philibert de la Choue, are you not, my son?" continued Leo XIII. "I was struck by the resemblance between some of your ideas and those of that devoted servant of the Church, who has in other ways given us previous testimony of his good feelings."

"Yes, indeed, Holy Father, Monsieur de la Choue is kind enough to show me some affection. We have often talked together, so it is not surprising that I should have given expression to some of his most cherished ideas."

"No doubt, no doubt. For instance, there is that question of the working-class guilds with which he largely occupies himself—with which, in fact, he occupies himself rather too much. At the time of his last journey to Rome he spoke to me of it in the most pressing manner. And in the same way, quite recently, another of your compatriots, one of the best and worthiest of men, Monsieur le Baron de Fouras, who brought us that superb pilgrimage of the St. Peter's Pence Fund, never ceased his efforts until I consented to receive him, when he spoke to me on the same subject during nearly an hour. Only it must be said that they do not agree in the matter, for one begs me to do things which the other will not have me do on any account."

Pierre realised that the conversation was straying away from his book, but he remembered having promised the Viscount that if he should see the Pope he would make an attempt to obtain from him a decisive expression of opinion on the famous question as to whether the working-class guilds or corporations

should be free or obligatory, open or closed. And the unhappy Viscount, kept in Paris by the gout, had written the young priest letter after letter on the subject, whilst his rival the Baron, availing himself of the opportunity offered by the international pilgrimage, endeavoured to wring from the Pope an approval of his own views, with which he would have returned in triumph to France. Pierre conscientiously desired to keep his promise, and so he answered: "Your Holiness knows better than any of us in which direction true wisdom lies. Monsieur de Fouras is of opinion that salvation, the solution of the labour question, lies simply in the re-establishment of the old free corporations, whilst Monsieur de la Choue desires the corporations to be obligatory, protected by the state and governed by new regulations. This last conception is certainly more in agreement with the social ideas now prevalent in France. Should your Holiness condescend to express a favourable opinion in that sense, the young French Catholic party would certainly know how to turn it to good result, by producing quite a movement of the working classes in favour of the Church."

In his quiet way Leo XIII responded: "But I cannot. Frenchmen always ask things of me which I cannot, will not do. What I will allow you to say on my behalf to Monsieur de la Choue is, that though I cannot content him I have not contented Monsieur de Fouras. He obtained from me nothing beyond the expression of my sincere good-will for the French working classes, who are so dear to me and who can do so much for the restoration of the faith. You

must surely understand, however, that among you Frenchmen there are questions of detail, of mere organisation, so to say, into which I cannot possibly enter without imparting to them an importance which they do not have, and at the same time greatly disconcerting some people should I please others."

As the Pope pronounced these last words he smiled a pale smile, in which the shrewd, conciliatory politician, who was determined not to allow his infallibility to be compromised in useless and risky ventures, was fully revealed. And then he drank a little more syrup and wiped his mouth with his handkerchief, like a sovereign whose Court day is over and who takes his ease, having chosen this hour of solitude and silence to chat as long as he may be so inclined.

Pierre, however, sought to bring him back to the subject of his book. "Monsieur de la Choue," said he, "has shown me so much kindness and is so anxious to know the fate reserved to my book — as if, indeed, it were his own — that I should have been very happy to convey to him an expression of your Holiness's approval."

However, the Pope continued wiping his mouth and did not reply.

"I became acquainted with the Viscount," continued Pierre, "at the residence of his Eminence Cardinal Bergerot, another great heart whose ardent charity ought to suffice to restore the faith in France."

This time the effect was immediate. "Ah! yes, Monsieur le Cardinal Bergerot!" said Leo XIII. "I read that letter of his which is printed at the beginning of your book. He was very badly inspired in

writing it to you ; and you, my son, acted very culpably on the day you published it. I cannot yet believe that Monsieur le Cardinal Bergerot had read some of your pages when he sent you an expression of his complete and full approval. I prefer to charge him with ignorance and thoughtlessness. How could he approve of your attacks on dogma, your revolutionary theories which tend to the complete destruction of our holy religion ? If it be a fact that he had read your book, the only excuse he can invoke is sudden and inexplicable aberration. It is true that a very bad spirit prevails among a small portion of the French clergy. What are called Gallican ideas are ever sprouting up like noxious weeds ; there is a malcontent Liberalism rebellious to our authority which continually hungers for free examination and sentimental adventures."

The Pope grew animated as he spoke. Italian words mingled with his hesitating French, and every now and again his full nasal voice resounded with the sonority of a brass instrument. "Monsieur le Cardinal Bergerot," he continued, "must be given to understand that we shall crush him on the day when we see in him nothing but a rebellious son. He owes the example of obedience ; we shall acquaint him with our displeasure, and we hope that he will submit. Humility and charity are great virtues doubtless, and we have always taken pleasure in recognising them in him. But they must not be the refuge of a rebellious heart, for they are as nothing unless accompanied by obedience — obedience, obedience, the finest adornment of the great saints !"

Pierre listened thunderstruck, overcome. He forgot

himself to think of the apostle of kindness and tolerance upon whose head he had drawn this all-powerful anger. So Don Vigilio had spoken the truth: over and above his — Pierre's — head the denunciations of the Bishops of Evreux and Poitiers were about to fall on the man who opposed their Ultramontane policy, that worthy and gentle Cardinal Bergerot, whose heart was open to all the woes of the lowly and the poor. This filled the young priest with despair; he could accept the denunciation of the Bishop of Tarbes acting on behalf of the Fathers of the Grotto, for that only fell on himself, as a reprisal for what he had written about Lourdes; but the underhand warfare of the others exasperated him, filled him with dolorous indignation. And from that puny old man before him with the slender, scraggy neck of an aged bird, he had suddenly seen such a wrathful, formidable Master arise that he trembled. How could he have allowed himself to be deceived by appearances on entering? How could he have imagined that he was simply in presence of a poor old man, worn out by age, desirous of peace, and ready for every concession? A blast had swept through that sleepy chamber, and all his doubts and his anguish awoke once more. Ah! that Pope, how thoroughly he answered to all the accounts that he, Pierre, had heard but had refused to believe; so many people had told him in Rome that he would find Leo XIII a man of intellect rather than of sentiment, a man of the most unbounded pride, who from his very youth had nourished the supreme ambition, to such a point indeed that he had promised eventual triumph to his relatives in order that they might make the

necessary sacrifices for him, while since he had occupied the pontifical throne his one will and determination had been to reign, to reign in spite of all, to be the sole absolute and omnipotent master of the world ! And now here was reality arising with irresistible force and confirming everything. And yet Pierre struggled, stubbornly clutching at his dream once more.

"Oh ! Holy Father," said he, "I should be grieved indeed if his Eminence should have a moment's worry on account of my unfortunate book. If I be guilty I can answer for my error, but his Eminence only obeyed the dictates of his heart and can only have transgressed by excess of love for the disinherited of the world !"

Leo XIII made no reply. He had again raised his superb eyes, those eyes of ardent life, set, as it were, in the motionless countenance of an alabaster idol ; and once more he was fixedly gazing at the young priest.

And Pierre, amidst his returning feverishness, seemed to behold him growing in power and splendour, whilst behind him arose a vision of the ages, a vision of that long line of popes whom the young priest had previously evoked, the saintly and the proud ones, the warriors and the ascetics, the theologians and the diplomatists, those who had worn armour, those who had conquered by the Cross, those who had disposed of empires as of mere provinces which God had committed to their charge. And in particular Pierre beheld the great Gregory, the conqueror and founder, and Sixtus V, the negotiator and politician, who had first foreseen the eventual victory of the papacy over

all the vanquished monarchies. Ah! what a throng of magnificent princes, of sovereign masters with powerful brains and arms, there was behind that pale, motionless, old man! What an accumulation of inexhaustible determination, stubborn genius, and boundless domination! The whole history of human ambition, the whole effort of the ages to subject the nations to the pride of one man, the greatest force that has ever conquered, exploited, and fashioned mankind in the name of its happiness! And even now, when territorial sovereignty had come to an end, how great was the spiritual sovereignty of that pale and slender old man, in whose presence women fainted, as if overcome by the divine splendour radiating from his person. Not only did all the resounding glories, the masterful triumphs of history spread out behind him, but heaven opened, the very spheres beyond life shone out in their dazzling mystery. He—the Pope—stood at the portals of heaven, holding the keys and opening those portals to human souls; all the ancient symbolism was revived, freed at last from the stains of royalty here below.

“Oh! I beg you, Holy Father,” resumed Pierre, “if an example be needed strike none other than myself. I have come, and am here; decide my fate, but do not aggravate my punishment by filling me with remorse at having brought condemnation on the innocent.”

Leo XIII still refrained from replying, though he continued to look at the young priest with burning eyes. And he, Pierre, no longer beheld Leo XIII, the last of a long line of popes, the Vicar of Jesus Christ, the Successor of the Prince of the Apostles, the

Supreme Pontiff of the Universal Church, Patriarch of the East, Primate of Italy, Archbishop and Metropolitan of the Roman Province, Sovereign of the Temporal Domains of the Holy Church; he saw the Leo XIII that he had dreamt of, the awaited saviour who would dispel the frightful cataclysm in which rotten society was sinking. He beheld him with his supple, lofty intelligence and fraternal, conciliatory tactics, avoiding friction and labouring to bring about unity; whilst with his heart overflowing with love he went straight to the hearts of the multitude, again giving the best of his blood in sign of the new alliance. He raised him aloft as the sole remaining moral authority, the sole possible bond of charity and peace — as the Father, in fact, who alone could stamp out injustice among his children, destroy misery, and re-establish the liberating Law of Work by bringing the nations back to the faith of the primitive Church, the gentleness and the wisdom of the true Christian community. And in the deep silence of that room the great figure which he thus set up assumed invincible all-powerfulness, extraordinary majesty.

“Oh, I beseech you, Holy Father, listen to me,” he said. “Do not even strike me, strike no one, neither a being nor a thing, anything that can suffer under the sun. Show kindness and indulgence to all, show all the kindness and indulgence which the sight of the world’s sufferings must have set in you!”

And then, seeing that Leo XIII still remained silent and still left him standing there, he sank down upon his knees, as if felled by the growing emotion which rendered his heart so heavy. And within him there

was a sort of *débâcle*; all his doubts, all his anguish and sadness burst forth in an irresistible stream. There was the memory of the frightful day that he had just spent, the tragic death of Dario and Benedetta, which weighed on him like lead; there were all the sufferings that he had experienced since his arrival in Rome, the destruction of his illusions, the wounds dealt to his delicacy, the buffets with which men and things had responded to his young enthusiasm; and, lying yet more deeply within his heart, there was the sum total of human wretchedness, the thought of famished ones howling for food, of mothers whose breasts were drained and who sobbed whilst kissing their hungry babes, of fathers without work, who clenched their fists and revolted — indeed, the whole of that hateful misery which is as old as mankind itself, which has preyed upon mankind since its earliest hour, and which he now had everywhere found increasing in horror and havoc, without a gleam of hope that it would ever be healed. And withal, yet more immense and more incurable, he felt within him a nameless sorrow to which he could assign no precise cause or name — an universal, an illimitable sorrow with which he melted despairingly, and which was perhaps the very sorrow of life.

“O Holy Father!” he exclaimed, “I myself have no existence and my book has no existence. I desired, passionately desired to see your Holiness that I might explain and defend myself. But I no longer know, I can no longer recall a single one of the things that I wished to say, I can only weep, weep the tears which are stifling me. Yes, I am but a poor man, and the

only need I feel is to speak to you of the poor. Oh! the poor ones, oh! the lowly ones, whom for two years past I have seen in our faubourgs of Paris, so wretched and so full of pain; the poor little children that I have picked out of the snow, the poor little angels who had eaten nothing for two days; the women too, consumed by consumption, without bread or fire, shivering in filthy hovels; and the men thrown on the street by slackness of trade, weary of begging for work as one begs for alms, sinking back into night, drunken with rage and harbouring the sole avenging thought of setting the whole city afire! And that night too, that terrible night, when in a room of horror I beheld a mother who had just killed herself with her five little ones, she lying on a palliasse suckling her last-born, and two little girls, two pretty little blondes, sleeping the last sleep beside her, while the two boys had succumbed farther away, one of them crouching against a wall, and the other lying upon the floor, distorted as though by a last effort to avoid death! . . . O Holy Father! I am but an ambassador, the messenger of those who suffer and who sob, the humble delegate of the humble ones who die of want beneath the hateful harshness, the frightful injustice of our present-day social system! And I bring your Holiness their tears, and I lay their tortures at your Holiness's feet, I raise their cry of woe, like a cry from the abyss, that cry which demands justice unless indeed the very heavens are to fall! Oh! show your loving kindness, Holy Father, show compassion!"

The young man had stretched out his arms and implored Leo XIII with a gesture as of supreme appeal

to the divine compassion. Then he continued: "And here, Holy Father, in this splendid and eternal Rome, is not the want and misery as frightful! During the weeks that I have roamed hither and thither among the dust of famous ruins, I have never ceased to come in contact with evils which demand cure. Ah! to think of all that is crumbling, all that is expiring, the agony of so much glory, the fearful sadness of a world which is dying of exhaustion and hunger! Yonder, under your Holiness's windows, have I not seen a district of horrors, a district of unfinished palaces stricken like rickety children who cannot attain to full growth, palaces which are already in ruins and have become places of refuge for all the woful misery of Rome? And here, as in Paris, what a suffering multitude, what a shameless exhibition too of the social sore, the devouring cancer openly tolerated and displayed in utter heedlessness! There are whole families leading idle and hungry lives in the splendid sunlight; fathers waiting for work to fall to them from heaven; sons listlessly spending their days asleep on the dry grass; mothers and daughters, withered before their time, shuffling about in loquacious idleness. O Holy Father, already to-morrow at dawn may your Holiness open that window yonder and with your benediction awaken that great childish people, which still slumbers in ignorance and poverty! May your Holiness give it the soul it lacks, a soul with the consciousness of human dignity, of the necessary law of work, of free and fraternal life regulated by justice only! Yes, may your Holiness make a people out of that heap of wretches, whose excuse lies in all their bodily suffering

and mental night, who live like the beasts that go by and die, never knowing nor understanding, yet ever lashed onward with the whip!"

Pierre's sobs were gradually choking him, and it was only the impulse of his passion which still enabled him to speak. "And, Holy Father," he continued, "is it not to you that I ought to address myself in the name of all these wretched ones? Are you not the Father, and is it not before the Father that the messenger of the poor and the lowly should kneel as I am kneeling now? And is it not to the Father that he should bring the huge burden of their sorrows and ask for pity and help and justice? Yes, particularly for justice! And since you are the Father throw the doors wide open so that all may enter, even the humblest of your children, the faithful, the chance passers, even the rebellious ones and those who have gone astray but who will perhaps enter and whom you will save from the errors of abandonment! Be as the house of refuge on the dangerous road, the loving greeter of the wayfarer, the lamp of hospitality which ever burns, and is seen afar off and saves one in the storm! And since, O Father, you are power be salvation also! You can do all; you have centuries of domination behind you; you have nowadays risen to a moral authority which has rendered you the arbiter of the world; you are there before me like the very majesty of the sun which illumines and fructifies! Oh! be the star of kindness and charity, be the redeemer; take in hand once more the purpose of Jesus, which has been perverted by being left in the hands of the rich and the power-

ful who have ended by transforming the work of the Gospel into the most hateful of all monuments of pride and tyranny! And since the work has been spoilt, take it in hand, begin it afresh, place yourself on the side of the little ones, the lowly ones, the poor ones, and bring them back to the peace, the fraternity, and the justice of the original Christian communion. And say, O Father, that I have understood you, that I have sincerely expressed in this respect your most cherished ideas, the sole living desire of your reign! The rest, oh! the rest, my book, myself, what matter they! I do not defend myself, I only seek your glory and the happiness of mankind. Say that from the depths of this Vatican you have heard the rending of our corrupt modern societies! Say that you have quivered with loving pity, say that you desire to prevent the awful impending catastrophe by recalling the Gospel to the hearts of your children who are stricken with madness, and by bringing them back to the age of simplicity and purity when the first Christians lived together in innocent brotherhood! Yes, it is for that reason, is it not, that you have placed yourself, Father, on the side of the poor, and for that reason I am here and entreat you for pity and kindness and justice with my whole soul!"

Then the young man gave way beneath his emotion, and fell all of a heap upon the floor amidst a rush of sobs — loud, endless sobs, which flowed forth in billows, coming as it were not only from himself but from all the wretched, from the whole world in whose veins sorrow coursed mingled with the very blood of life. He was there as the ambassador of suffering, as

he had said. And indeed, at the foot of that mute and motionless pope, he was like the personification of the whole of human woe.

Leo XIII, who was extremely fond of talking and could only listen to others with an effort, had twice raised one of his pallid hands to interrupt the young priest. Then, gradually overcome by astonishment, touched by emotion himself, he had allowed him to continue, to go on to the end of his outburst. A little blood even had suffused the snowy whiteness of the Pontiff's face whilst his eyes shone out yet more brilliantly. And as soon as he saw the young man speechless at his feet, shaken by those sobs which seemed to be wrenching away his heart, he became anxious and leant forward: "Calm yourself, my son, raise yourself," he said.

But the sobs still continued, still flowed forth, all reason and respect being swept away amidst that distracted plaint of a wounded soul, that moan of suffering, dying flesh.

"Raise yourself, my son, it is not proper," repeated Leo XIII. "There, take that chair." And with a gesture of authority he at last invited the young man to sit down.

Pierre rose with pain, and at once seated himself in order that he might not fall. He brushed his hair back from his forehead, and wiped his scalding tears away with his hands, unable to understand what had just happened, but striving to regain his self-possession.

"You appeal to the Holy Father," said Leo XIII. "Ah! rest assured that his heart is full of pity and affection for those who are unfortunate. But that is

not the point, it is our holy religion which is in question. I have read your book, a bad book, I tell you so at once, the most dangerous and culpable of books, precisely on account of its qualities, the pages in which I myself felt interested. Yes, I was often fascinated, I should not have continued my perusal had I not felt carried away, transported by the ardent breath of your faith and enthusiasm. The subject 'New Rome' is such a beautiful one and impassions me so much! and certainly there is a book to be written under that title, but in a very different spirit to yours. You think that you have understood me, my son, that you have so penetrated yourself with my writings and actions that you simply express my most cherished ideas. But no, no, you have not understood me, and that is why I desired to see you, explain things to you, and convince you."

It was now Pierre who sat listening, mute and motionless. Yet he had only come thither to defend himself; for three months past he had been feverishly desiring this interview, preparing his arguments and feeling confident of victory; and now although he heard his book spoken of as dangerous and culpable he did not protest, did not reply with any one of those good reasons which he had deemed so irresistible. But the fact was that intense weariness had come upon him, the appeal that he had made, the tears that he had shed had left him utterly exhausted. By and by, however, he would be brave and would say what he had resolved to say.

"People do not understand me, do not understand me!" resumed Leo XIII with an air of impatient

irritation. "It is incredible what trouble I have to make myself understood, in France especially! Take the temporal power for instance; how can you have fancied that the Holy See would ever enter into any compromise on that question? Such language is unworthy of a priest, it is the chimerical dream of one who is ignorant of the conditions in which the papacy has hitherto lived and in which it must still live if it does not desire to disappear. Cannot you see the sophistry of your argument that the Church becomes the loftier the more it frees itself from the cares of terrestrial sovereignty? A purely spiritual royalty, a sway of charity and love, indeed, 'tis a fine imaginative idea! But who will ensure us respect? Who will grant us the alms of a stone on which to rest our head if we are ever driven forth and forced to roam the highways? Who will guarantee our independence when we are at the mercy of every state? . . . No, no! this soil of Rome is ours, we have inherited it from the long line of our ancestors, and it is the indestructible, eternal soil on which the Church is built, so that any relinquishment would mean the downfall of the Holy Catholic Apostolic and Roman Church. And, moreover, we could not relinquish it; we are bound by our oath to God and man."

He paused for a moment to allow Pierre to answer him. But the latter to his stupefaction could say nothing, for he perceived that this pope spoke as he was bound to speak. All the heavy mysterious things which had weighed the young priest down whilst he was waiting in the ante-room, now became more and more clearly defined. They were, indeed,

the things which he had seen and learnt since his arrival in Rome, the disillusion, the rebuffs which he had experienced, all the many points of difference between existing reality and imagination, whereby his dream of a return to primitive Christianity was already half shattered. And in particular he remembered the hour which he had spent on the dome of St. Peter's, when, in presence of the old city of glory so stubbornly clinging to its purple, he had realised that he was an imbecile with his idea of a purely spiritual pope. He had that day fled from the furious shouts of the pilgrims acclaiming the Pope-King. He had only accepted the necessity for money, that last form of servitude still binding the Pope to earth. But all had crumbled afterwards, when he had beheld the real Rome, the ancient city of pride and domination where the papacy can never be complete without the temporal power. Too many bonds, dogma, tradition, environment, the very soil itself rendered the Church for ever immutable. It was only in appearances that she could make concessions, and a time would even arrive when her concessions would cease, in presence of the impossibility of going any further without committing suicide. If his, Pierre's, dream of a New Rome were ever to be realised, it would only be far away from ancient Rome. Only in some distant region could the new Christianity arise, for Catholicism was bound to die on the spot when the last of the popes, riveted to that land of ruins, should disappear beneath the falling dome of St. Peter's, which would fall as surely as the temple of Jupiter had fallen! And, as for that pope of the present day, though he

might have no kingdom, though age might have made him weak and fragile, though his bloodless pallor might be that of some ancient idol of wax, he none the less flared with the red passion for universal sovereignty, he was none the less the stubborn scion of his ancestry, the Pontifex Maximus, the Cæsar Imperator in whose veins flowed the blood of Augustus, master of the world.

"You must be fully aware," resumed Leo XIII, "of the ardent desire for unity which has always possessed us. We were very happy on the day when we unified the rite, by imposing the Roman rite throughout the whole Catholic world. This is one of our most cherished victories, for it can do much to uphold our authority. And I hope that our efforts in the East will end by bringing our dear brethren of the dissident communions back to us, in the same way as I do not despair of convincing the Anglican sects, without speaking of the other so-called Protestant sects who will be compelled to return to the bosom of the only Church, the Catholic, Apostolic, and Roman Church, when the times predicted by the Christ shall be accomplished. But a thing which you did not say in your book is that the Church can relinquish nothing whatever of dogma. On the contrary, you seem to fancy that an agreement might be effected, concessions made on either side, and that, my son, is a culpable thought, such language as a priest cannot use without being guilty of a crime. No, the truth is absolute, not a stone of the edifice shall be changed. Oh! in matters of form, we will do whatever may be asked. We are ready to adopt the most conciliatory courses if it

be only a question of turning certain difficulties and weighing expressions in order to facilitate agreement. . . . Again, there is the part we have taken in contemporary socialism, and here too it is necessary that we should be understood. Those whom you have so well called the disinherited of the world, are certainly the object of our solicitude. If socialism be simply a desire for justice, and a constant determination to come to the help of the weak and the suffering, who can claim to give more thought to the matter and work with more energy than ourselves? Has not the Church always been the mother of the afflicted, the helper and benefactress of the poor? We are for all reasonable progress, we admit all new social forms which will promote peace and fraternity. . . . Only we can but condemn that socialism which begins by driving away God as a means of ensuring the happiness of mankind. Therein lies simple savagery, an abominable relapse into the primitive state in which there can only be catastrophe, conflagration, and massacre. And that again is a point on which you have not laid sufficient stress, for you have not shown in your book that there can be no progress outside the pale of the Church, that she is really the only initiatory and guiding power to whom one may surrender oneself without fear. Indeed, and in this again you have sinned, it seemed to me as if you set God on one side, as if for you religion lay solely in a certain bent of the soul, a florescence of love and charity, which sufficed one to work one's salvation. But that is execrable heresy. God is ever present, master of souls and bodies; and religion remains the bond, the

law, the very governing power of mankind, apart from which there can only be barbarism in this world and damnation in the next. And, once again, forms are of no importance; it is sufficient that dogma should remain. Thus our adhesion to the French Republic proves that we in no wise mean to link the fate of religion to that of any form of government, however august and ancient the latter may be. Dynasties may have done their time, but God is eternal. Kings may perish, but God lives! And, moreover, there is nothing anti-Christian in the republican form of government; indeed, on the contrary, it would seem like an awakening of that Christian commonwealth to which you have referred in some really charming pages. The worst is that liberty at once becomes license, and that our desire for conciliation is often very badly requited. . . . But ah! what a wicked book you have written, my son,—with the best intentions, I am willing to believe,—and how your silence shows that you are beginning to recognise the disastrous consequences of your error.”

Pierre still remained silent, overcome, feeling as if his arguments would fall against some deaf, blind, and impenetrable rock, which it was useless to assail since nothing could enter it. And only one thing now pre-occupied him; he wondered how it was that a man of such intelligence and such ambition had not formed a more distinct and exact idea of the modern world. He could divine that the Pope possessed much information and carried the map of Christendom with many of the needs, deeds, and hopes of the nations, in his mind amidst his complicated diplomatic enterprises;

but at the same time what gaps there were in his knowledge! The truth, no doubt, was that his personal acquaintance with the world was confined to his brief nunciature at Brussels.¹

During his occupation of the see of Perugia, which had followed, he had only mingled with the dawning life of young Italy. And for eighteen years now he had been shut up in the Vatican, isolated from the rest of mankind and communicating with the nations solely through his *entourage*, which was often most unintelligent, most mendacious, and most treacherous. Moreover, he was an Italian priest, a superstitious and despotic High Pontiff, bound by tradition, subjected to the influences of race environment, pecuniary considerations, and political necessities, not to speak of his great pride, the conviction that he ought to be implicitly obeyed in all things as the one sole legitimate power upon earth. Therein lay fatal causes of mental deformity, of errors and gaps in his extraordinary brain, though the latter certainly possessed many admirable qualities, quickness of comprehension and patient stubbornness of will and strength to draw conclusions and act. Of all his powers, however, that of intuition was certainly the most wonderful, for was it not this alone which, owing to his voluntary imprisonment, enabled him to divine the vast evolution of humanity at the present day? He was thus keenly conscious of the dangers surrounding him, of the rising tide of democracy and the boundless ocean of science which threatened to submerge the little islet where the dome

¹ That too, was in 1843-44, and the world is now utterly unlike what it was then! — *Trans.*

of St. Peter's yet triumphed. And the object of all his policy, of all his labour, was to conquer so that he might reign. If he desired the unity of the Church it was in order that the latter might become strong and inexpugnable in the contest which he foresaw. If he preached conciliation, granting concessions in matters of form, tolerating audacious actions on the part of American bishops, it was because he deeply and secretly feared the dislocation of the Church, some sudden schism which might hasten disaster. And this fear explained his returning affection for the people, the concern which he displayed respecting socialism, and the Christian solution which he offered to the woes of earthly life. As Cæsar was stricken low, was not the long contest for possession of the people over, and would not the people, the great silent multitude, speak out, and give itself to him, the Pope? He had begun experiments with France, forsaking the lost cause of the monarchy and recognising the Republic which he hoped might prove strong and victorious, for in spite of everything France remained the eldest daughter of the Church, the only Catholic nation which yet possessed sufficient strength to restore the temporal power at some propitious moment. And briefly Leo's desire was to reign. To reign by the support of France since it seemed impossible to do so by the support of Germany! To reign by the support of the people, since the people was now becoming the master, the bestower of thrones! To reign by means even of an Italian Republic, if only that Republic could wrest Rome from the House of Savoy and restore her to him, a federal Republic

which would make him President of the United States of Italy pending the time when he should be President of the United States of Europe! To reign in spite of everybody and everything, such was his ambition, to reign over the world, even as Augustus had reigned, Augustus whose devouring blood alone upheld this expiring old man, yet so stubbornly clinging to power!

"And another crime of yours, my son," resumed Leo XIII, "is that you have dared to ask for a new religion. That is impious, blasphemous, sacrilegious. There is but one religion in the world, our Holy Catholic Apostolic and Roman Religion, apart from which there can be but darkness and damnation. I quite understand that what you mean to imply is a return to early Christianity. But the error of so-called Protestantism, so culpable and so deplorable in its consequences, never had any other pretext. As soon as one departs from the strict observance of dogma and absolute respect for tradition one sinks into the most frightful precipices. . . . Ah! schism, schism, my son, is a crime beyond forgiveness, an assassination of the true God, a device of the loathsome Beast of Temptation which Hell sends into the world to work the ruin of the faithful! If your book contained nothing beyond those words 'a new religion,' it would be necessary to destroy and burn it like so much poison fatal in its effects upon the human soul."

He continued at length on this subject, while Pierre recalled what Don Vigilio had told him of those all-powerful Jesuits who at the Vatican as elsewhere remained in the background, secretly but none

the less decisively governing the Church. Was it true then that this pope, whose opportunist tendencies were so freely displayed, was one of them, a mere docile instrument in their hands, though he fancied himself penetrated with the doctrines of St. Thomas Aquinas? In any case, like them he compounded with the century, made approaches to the world, and was willing to flatter it in order that he might possess it. Never before had Pierre so cruelly realised that the Church was now so reduced that she could only live by dint of concessions and diplomacy. And he could at last distinctly picture that Roman clergy which at first is so difficult of comprehension to a French priest, that Government of the Church, represented by the pope, the cardinals, and the prelates, whom the Deity has appointed to govern and administer His mundane possessions—mankind and the earth. They begin by setting that very Deity on one side, in the depths of the tabernacle, and impose whatever dogmas they please as so many essential truths. That the Deity exists is evident, since they govern in His name which is sufficient for everything. And being by virtue of their charge the masters, if they consent to sign covenants, Concordats, it is only as matters of form; they do not observe them, and never yield to anything but force, always reserving the principle of their absolute sovereignty which must some day finally triumph. Pending that day's arrival, they act as diplomatists, slowly carrying on their work of conquest as the Deity's functionaries; and religion is but the public homage which they pay to the Deity, and which they organise with all the pomp and magnificence that

is likely to influence the multitude. Their only object is to enrapture and conquer mankind in order that the latter may submit to the rule of the Deity, that is the rule of themselves, since they are the Deity's visible representatives, expressly delegated to govern the world. In a word, they straightway descend from Roman law, they are still but the offspring of the old pagan soul of Rome, and if they have lasted until now and if they rely on lasting for ever, until the awaited hour when the empire of the world shall be restored to them, it is because they are the direct heirs of the purple-robed Cæsars, the uninterrupted and living progeny of the blood of Augustus.

And thereupon Pierre felt ashamed of his tears. Ah! those poor nerves of his, that outburst of sentiment and enthusiasm to which he had given way! His very modesty was appalled, for he felt as if he had exhibited his soul in utter nakedness. And so uselessly too, in that room where nothing similar had ever been said before, and in presence of that Pontiff-King who could not understand him. His plan of the popes reigning by means of the poor and lowly now horrified him. His idea of the papacy going to the people, at last rid of its former masters, seemed to him a suggestion worthy of a wolf, for if the papacy should go to the people it would only be to prey upon it as the others had done. And really he, Pierre, must have been mad when he had imagined that a Roman prelate, a cardinal, a pope, was capable of admitting a return to the Christian commonwealth, a fresh florescence of primitive Christianity to pacify the aged nations whom hatred consumed. Such a

conception indeed was beyond the comprehension of men who for centuries had regarded themselves as masters of the world, so heedless and disdainful of the lowly and the suffering, that they had at last become altogether incapable of either love or charity.¹

Leo XIII, however, was still holding forth in his full, unwearying voice. And the young priest heard him saying: "Why did you write that page on Lourdes which shows such a thoroughly bad spirit? Lourdes, my son, has rendered great services to religion. To the persons who have come and told me of the touching miracles which are witnessed at the Grotto almost daily, I have often expressed my desire to see those miracles confirmed, proved by the most rigorous scientific tests. And, indeed, according to what I have read, I do not think that the most evilly disposed minds can entertain any further doubt on the matter, for the miracles *are* proved scientifically in the most irrefutable manner. Science, my son, must be God's servant. It can do nothing against Him, it is only by His grace that it arrives at the truth. All the solutions which people nowadays pretend to discover and which seemingly destroy dogma will some day be recognised as false, for God's truth will remain victorious when the times shall be accomplished. That is a very simple certainty, known even to little children, and it would suffice for the peace and salvation of mankind, if mankind would content itself with it. And be convinced, my son, that faith and

¹ The reader should bear in mind that these remarks apply to the *Italian* cardinals and prelates, whose vanity and egotism are remarkable. — *Trans.*

reason are not incompatible. Have we not got St. Thomas who foresaw everything, explained everything, regulated everything? Your faith has been shaken by the onslaught of the spirit of examination, you have known trouble and anguish which Heaven has been pleased to spare our priests in this land of ancient belief, this city of Rome which the blood of so many martyrs has sanctified. However, we have no fear of the spirit of examination, study St. Thomas, read him thoroughly and your faith will return, definitive and triumphant, firmer than ever."

These remarks caused Pierre as much dismay as if fragments of the celestial vault were raining on his head. O God of truth, miracles—the miracles of Lourdes!—proved scientifically, faith in the dogmas compatible with reason, and the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas sufficient to instil certainty into the minds of this present generation! How could one answer that, and indeed why answer it at all?

"Yes, yours is a most culpable and dangerous book," concluded Leo XIII; "its very title 'New Rome' is mendacious and poisonous, and the work is the more to be condemned as it offers every fascination of style, every perversion of generous fancy. Briefly it is such a book that a priest, if he conceived it in an hour of error, can have no other duty than that of burning it in public with the very hand which traced the pages of error and scandal."

All at once Pierre rose up erect. He was about to exclaim: "'Tis true, I had lost my faith, but I thought I had found it again in the compassion which the woes of the world set in my heart. You were my

last hope, the awaited saviour. But, behold, that again is a dream, you cannot take the work of Jesus in hand once more and pacify mankind so as to avert the frightful fratricidal war which is preparing. You cannot leave your throne and come along the roads with the poor and the humble to carry out the supreme work of fraternity. Well, it is all over with you, your Vatican and your St. Peter's. All is falling before the onslaught of the rising multitude and growing science. You no longer exist, there are only ruins and remnants left here."

However, he did not speak those words. He simply bowed and said: "Holy Father, I make my submission and reprobate my book." And as he thus replied his voice trembled with disgust, and his open hands made a gesture of surrender as though he were yielding up his soul. The words he had chosen were precisely those of the required formula: *Auctor laudabiliter se subjecit et opus reprobavit*. "The author has laudably made his submission and reprobated his work." No error could have been confessed, no hope could have accomplished self-destruction with loftier despair, more sovereign grandeur. But what frightful irony: that book which he had sworn never to withdraw, and for whose triumph he had fought so passionately, and which he himself now denied and suppressed, not because he deemed it guilty, but because he had just realised that it was as futile, as chimerical as a lover's desire, a poet's dream. Ah! yes, since he had been mistaken, since he had merely dreamed, since he had found there neither the Deity nor the priest that he had desired for the happiness of mankind, why should

he obstinately cling to the illusion of an awakening which was impossible! 'Twere better to fling his book on the ground like a dead leaf, better to deny it, better to cut it away like a dead limb that could serve no purpose whatever!

Somewhat surprised by such a prompt victory Leo XIII raised a slight exclamation of content. "That is well said, my son, that is well said! You have spoken the only words that can become a priest."

And in his evident satisfaction, he who left nothing to chance, who carefully prepared each of his audiences, deciding beforehand what words he would say, what gestures even he would make, unbent somewhat and displayed real *bonhomie*. Unable to understand, mistaking the real motives of this rebellious priest's submission, he tasted positive delight in having so easily reduced him to silence, the more so as report had stated the young man to be a terrible revolutionary. And thus his Holiness felt quite proud of such a conversion. "Moreover, my son," he said, "I did not expect less of one of your distinguished mind. There can be no loftier enjoyment than that of owning one's error, doing penance, and submitting."

He had again taken the glass off the little table beside him and was stirring the last spoonful of syrup before drinking it. And Pierre was amazed at again finding him as he had found him at the outset, shrunken, bereft of sovereign majesty, and simply suggestive of some aged *bourgeois* drinking his glass of sugared water before getting into bed. It was as if after growing and radiating, like a planet ascending to the zenith, he had again sunk to the level of the soil in all

human mediocrity. Again did Pierre find him puny and fragile, with the slender neck of a little sick bird, and all those marks of senile ugliness which rendered him so exacting with regard to his portraits, whether they were oil paintings or photographs, gold medals, or marble busts, for of one and the other he would say that the artist must not portray "Papa Pecci" but Leo XIII, the great Pope, of whom he desired to leave such a lofty image to posterity. And Pierre, after momentarily ceasing to see them, was again embarrassed by the handkerchief which lay on the Pope's lap, and the dirty cassock soiled by snuff. His only feelings now were affectionate pity for such white old age, deep admiration for the stubborn power of life which had found a refuge in those dark black eyes, and respectful deference, such as became a worker, for that large brain which harboured such vast projects and overflowed with such innumerable ideas and actions.

The audience was over, and the young man bowed low: "I thank your Holiness for having deigned to give me such a fatherly reception," he said.

However, Leo XIII detained him for a moment longer, speaking to him of France and expressing his sincere desire to see her prosperous, calm, and strong for the greater advantage of the Church. And Pierre, during that last moment, had a singular vision, a strange haunting fancy. As he gazed at the Holy Father's ivory brow and thought of his great age and of his liability to be carried off by the slightest chill, he involuntarily recalled the scene instinct with a fierce grandeur which is witnessed each time a pope dies. He recalled Pius IX, Giovanni Mastai, two

hours after death, his face covered by a white linen cloth, while the pontifical family surrounded him in dismay; and then Cardinal Pecci, the *Camerlingo*, approaching the bed, drawing aside the veil and dealing three taps with his silver hammer on the forehead of the deceased, repeating at each tap the call, "Giovanni! Giovanni! Giovanni!" And as the corpse made no response, turning, after an interval of a few seconds, and saying: "The Pope is dead!" And at the same time, yonder in the Via Giulia Pierre pictured Cardinal Boccanera, the present *Camerlingo*, awaiting his turn with his silver hammer, and he imagined Leo XIII, otherwise Gioachino Pecci, dead, like his predecessor, his face covered by a white linen cloth and his corpse surrounded by his prelates in that very room. And he saw the *Camerlingo* approach, draw the veil aside and tap the ivory forehead, each time repeating the call: "Gioachino! Gioachino! Gioachino!" Then, as the corpse did not answer, he waited for a few seconds and turned and said: "The Pope is dead!" Did Leo XIII remember how he had thrice tapped the forehead of Pius IX, and did he ever feel on the brow an icy dread of the silver hammer with which he had armed his own *Camerlingo*, the man whom he knew to be his implacable adversary, Cardinal Boccanera?

"Go in peace, my son," at last said his Holiness by way of parting benediction. "Your transgression will be forgiven you since you have confessed and testify your horror for it."

With distressful spirit, accepting humiliation as well-deserved chastisement for his chimerical fancies, Pierre

retired, stepping backwards according to the customary ceremonial. He made three deep bows and crossed the threshold without turning, followed by the black eyes of Leo XIII, which never left him. Still he saw the Pope stretch his arm towards the table to take up the newspaper which he had been reading prior to the audience, for Leo retained a great fancy for newspapers, and was very inquisitive as to news, though in the isolation in which he lived he frequently made mistakes respecting the relative importance of articles. And once more the chamber sank into deep quietude, whilst the two lamps continued to diffuse a soft and steady light.

In the centre of the *anticamera segreta* Signor Squadra stood waiting black and motionless. And on noticing that Pierre in his flurry forgot to take his hat from the pier table, he himself discreetly fetched it and handed it to the young priest with a silent bow. Then without any appearance of haste, he walked ahead to conduct the visitor back to the Sala Clementina. The endless promenade through the interminable ante-rooms began once more, and there was still not a soul, not a sound, not a breath. In each empty room stood the one solitary lamp, burning low amidst a yet deeper silence than before. The wilderness seemed also to have grown larger as the night advanced, casting its gloom over the few articles of furniture scattered under the lofty gilded ceilings, the thrones, the stools, the pier tables, the crucifixes, and the candelabra which recurred in each succeeding room. And at last the Sala Clementina which the Swiss Guards had just quitted was reached again, and Signor Squa-

dra, who hitherto had not turned his head, thereupon drew aside without word or gesture, and, saluting Pierre with a last bow, allowed him to pass on. Then he himself disappeared.

And Pierre descended the two flights of the monumental staircase where the gas jets in their globes of ground glass glimmered like night lights amidst a wondrously heavy silence now that the footsteps of the sentries no longer resounded on the landings. And he crossed the Court of St. Damasus, empty and lifeless in the pale light of the lamps above the steps, and descended the Scala Pia, that other great stairway as dim, deserted, and void of life as all the rest, and at last passed beyond the bronze door which a porter slowly shut behind him. And with what a rumble, what a fierce roar did the hard metal close upon all that was within; all the accumulated darkness and silence; the dead, motionless centuries perpetuated by tradition; the indestructible idols, the dogmas, bound round for preservation like mummies; every chain which may weigh on one or hamper one, the whole apparatus of bondage and sovereign domination, with whose formidable clang all the dark, deserted halls re-echoed.

Once more the young man found himself alone on the gloomy expanse of the Piazza of St. Peter's. Not a single belated pedestrian was to be seen. There was only the lofty, livid, ghost-like obelisk, emerging between its four candelabra, from the mosaic pavement of red and serpentine porphyry. The façade of the Basilica also showed vaguely, pale as a vision, whilst from it on either side like a pair of giant arms stretched

the quadruple colonnade, a thicket of stone, steeped in obscurity. The dome was but a huge roundness scarcely discernible against the moonless sky; and only the jets of the fountains, which could at last be detected rising like slim phantoms ever on the move, lent a voice to the silence, the endless murmur of a plaint of sorrow coming one knew not whence. Ah! how great was the melancholy grandeur of that slumber, that famous square, the Vatican and St. Peter's, thus seen by night when wrapped in silence and darkness! But suddenly the clock struck ten with so slow and loud a chime that never, so it seemed, had more solemn and decisive an hour rung out amidst blacker and more unfathomable gloom. All Pierre's poor weary frame quivered at the sound as he stood motionless in the centre of the expanse. What! had he spent barely three-quarters of an hour, chatting up yonder with that white old man who had just wrenched all his soul away from him! Yes, it was the final wrench; his last belief had been torn from his bleeding heart and brain. The supreme experiment had been made, a world had collapsed within him. And all at once he thought of Monsignor Nani, and reflected that he alone had been right. He, Pierre, had been told that in any case he would end by doing what Monsignor Nani might desire, and he was now stupefied to find that he had done so.

But sudden despair seized upon him, such atrocious distress of spirit that, from the depths of the abyss of darkness where he stood, he raised his quivering arms into space and spoke aloud: "No, no, Thou art not here, O God of life and love, O God of Salvation!

But come, appear since Thy children are perishing because they know neither who Thou art, nor where to find Thee amidst the Infinite of the worlds !”

Above the vast square spread the vast sky of dark-blue velvet, the silent disturbing Infinite, where the constellations palpitated. Over the roofs of the Vatican, Charles's Wain seemed yet more tilted, its golden wheels straying from the right path, its golden shaft upreared in the air ; whilst yonder, over Rome towards the Via Giulia, Orion was about to disappear and already showed but one of the three golden stars which bedecked his belt.

XV

It was nearly daybreak when Pierre fell asleep, exhausted by emotion and hot with fever. And at nine o'clock, when he had risen and breakfasted, he at once wished to go down into Cardinal Boccanera's rooms where the bodies of Dario and Benedetta had been laid in state in order that the members of the family, its friends and clients, might bring them their tears and prayers.

Whilst he breakfasted, Victorine who, showing an active bravery amidst her despair, had not been to bed at all, told him of what had taken place in the house during the night and early morning. Donna Serafina, prude that she was, had again made an attempt to have the bodies separated; but this had proved an impossibility, as *rigor mortis* had set in, and to part the lovers it would have been necessary to break their limbs. Moreover, the Cardinal, who had interposed once before, almost quarrelled with his sister on the subject, unwilling as he was that any one should disturb the lovers' last slumber, their union of eternity. Beneath his priestly garb there coursed the blood of his race, a pride in the passions of former times; and he remarked that if the family counted two popes among its forerunners, it had also been rendered illustrious by great captains and ardent lovers.

Never would he allow any one to touch those two children, whose dolorous lives had been so pure and whom the grave alone had united. He was the master in his house, and they should be sewn together in the same shroud, and nailed together in the same coffin. Then too the religious service should take place at the neighbouring church of San Carlo, of which he was Cardinal-priest and where again he was the master. And if needful he would address himself to the Pope. And such being his sovereign will, so authoritatively expressed, everybody in the house had to bow submissively.

Donna Serafina at once occupied herself with the laying-out. According to the Roman custom the servants were present, and Victorine as the oldest and most appreciated of them, assisted the relatives. All that could be done in the first instance was to envelop both corpses in Benedetta's unbound hair, thick and odorous hair, which spread out into a royal mantle; and they were then laid together in one shroud of white silk, fastened about their necks in such wise that they formed but one being in death. And again the Cardinal imperatively ordered that they should be brought into his apartments and placed on a state bed in the centre of the throne-room, so that a supreme homage might be rendered to them as to the last scions of the name, the two tragic lovers with whom the once resounding glory of the Boccaneras was about to return to earth. The story which had been arranged was already circulating through Rome; folks related how Dario had been carried off in a few hours by infectious fever, and how Benedetta, mad-

dened by grief, had expired whilst clasping him in her arms to bid him a last farewell; and there was talk too of the royal honours which the bodies were to receive, the superb funeral nuptials which were to be accorded them as they lay clasped on their bed of eternal rest. All Rome, quite overcome by this tragic story of love and death, would talk of nothing else for several weeks.

Pierre would have started for France that same night, eager as he was to quit the city of disaster where he had lost the last shreds of his faith, but he desired to attend the obsequies, and therefore postponed his departure until the following evening. And thus he would spend one more day in that old crumbling palace, near the corpse of that unhappy young woman to whom he had been so much attached and for whom he would try to find some prayers in the depths of his empty and lacerated heart.

When he reached the threshold of the Cardinal's reception-rooms, he suddenly remembered his first visit to them. They still presented the same aspect of ancient princely pomp falling into decay and dust. The doors of the three large ante-rooms were wide open, and the rooms themselves were at that early hour still empty. In the first one, the servants' ante-room, there was nobody but Giacomo who stood motionless in his black livery in front of the old red hat hanging under the *baldacchino* where spiders spun their webs between the crumbling tassels. In the second room, which the secretary formerly had occupied, Abbé Paparelli, the train-bearer, was softly walking up and down whilst waiting for visitors; and with

his conquering humility, his all-powerful obsequiousness, he had never before so closely resembled an old maid, whitened and wrinkled by excess of devout observances. Finally, in the third ante-room, the *anticamera nobile*, where the red cap lay on a credence facing the large imperious portrait of the Cardinal in ceremonial costume, there was Don Vigilio who had left his little work-table to station himself at the door of the throne-room and there bow to those who crossed the threshold. And on that gloomy winter morning the rooms appeared more mournful and dilapidated than ever, the hangings frayed and ragged, the few articles of furniture covered with dust, the old wood-work crumbling beneath the continuous onslaught of termites, and the ceilings alone retaining their pompous show of gilding and painting.

However, Pierre, to whom Abbé Paparelli addressed a profound bow, in which one divined the irony of a sort of dismissal given to one who was vanquished, felt more impressed by the mournful grandeur which those three dilapidated rooms presented that day, conducting as they did to the old throne-room, now a chamber of death, where the two last children of the house slept their last sleep. What a superb and sorrowful *gala* of death! Every door wide open and all the emptiness of those over-spacious rooms, void of the throngs of ancient days and leading to the supreme affliction — the end of a race! The Cardinal had shut himself up in his little work-room where he received the relatives and intimates who desired to present their condolences to him, whilst Donna Serafina had chosen an adjoining apartment to await

her lady friends who would come in procession until evening. And Pierre, informed of the ceremonial by Victorine, had in the first place to enter the throne-room, greeted as he passed by a deep bow from Don Vigilio who, pale and silent, did not seem to recognise him.

A surprise awaited the young priest. He had expected such a lying-in-state as is seen in France and elsewhere, all windows closed so as to steep the room in night, and hundreds of candles burning round a *catafalco*, whilst from ceiling to floor the walls were hung with black drapery. He had been told that the bodies would lie in the throne-room because the antique chapel on the ground floor of the palazzo had been shut up for half a century and was in no condition to be used, whilst the Cardinal's little private chapel was altogether too small for any such ceremony. And thus it had been necessary to improvise an altar in the throne-room, an altar at which masses had been said ever since dawn. Masses and other religious services were moreover to be celebrated all day long in the private chapel; and two additional altars had even been set up, one in a small room adjoining the *anticamera nobile* and the other in a sort of alcove communicating with the second ante-room: and in this wise priests, Franciscans, and members of other Orders bound by the vow of poverty, would simultaneously and without intermission celebrate the divine sacrifice on those four altars. The Cardinal, indeed, had desired that the Divine Blood should flow without pause under his roof for the redemption of those two dear souls which had flown

away together. And thus in that mourning mansion, through those funeral halls the bells scarcely stopped tinkling for the elevation of the host, whilst the quivering murmur of Latin words ever continued, and consecrated wafers were continually broken and chalices drained, in such wise that the Divine Presence could not for a moment quit the heavy atmosphere all redolent of death.

On the other hand, however, Pierre, to his great astonishment, found the throne-room much as it had been on the day of his first visit. The curtains of the four large windows had not even been drawn, and the grey, cold, subdued light of the gloomy winter morning freely entered. Under the ceiling of carved and gilded wood-work there were the customary red wall-hangings of *brocatelle*, worn away by long usage; and there was the old throne with the arm-chair turned to the wall, uselessly waiting for a visit from the Pope which would never more come. The principal changes in the aspect of the room were that its seats and tables had been removed, and that, in addition to the improvised altar arranged beside the throne, it now contained the state bed on which lay the bodies of Benedetta and Dario, amidst a profusion of flowers. The bed stood in the centre of the room on a low platform, and at its head were two lighted candles, one on either side. There was nothing else, nothing but that wealth of flowers, such a harvest of white roses that one wondered in what fairy garden they had been culled, sheaves of them on the bed, sheaves of them toppling from the bed, sheaves of them covering the step of the platform, and falling from that

step on to the magnificent marble paving of the room.

Pierre drew near to the bed, his heart faint with emotion. Those tapers whose little yellow flamelets scarcely showed in the pale daylight, that continuous low murmur of the mass being said at the altar, that penetrating perfume of roses which rendered the atmosphere so heavy, filled the antiquated, dusty room with a spirit of infinite woe, a lamentation of boundless mourning. And there was not a gesture, not a word spoken, save by the priest officiating at the altar, nothing but an occasional faint sound of stifled sobbing among the few persons present. Servants of the house constantly relieved one another, four always standing erect and motionless at the head of the bed, like faithful, familiar guards. From time to time Consistorial-Advocate Morano who, since early morning had been attending to everything, crossed the room with a silent step and the air of a man in a hurry. And at the edge of the platform all who entered, knelt, prayed, and wept. Pierre perceived three ladies there, their faces hidden by their handkerchiefs; and there was also an old priest who trembled with grief and hung his head in such wise that his face could not be distinguished. However, the young man was most moved by the sight of a poorly clad girl, whom he took for a servant, and whom sorrow had utterly prostrated on the marble slabs.

Then in his turn he knelt down, and with the professional murmur of the lips sought to repeat the Latin prayers which, as a priest, he had so often said

at the bedside of the departed. But his growing emotion confused his memory, and he became wrapt in contemplation of the lovers whom his eyes were unable to quit. Under the wealth of flowers which covered them the clasped bodies could scarcely be distinguished, but the two heads emerged from the silken shroud, and lying there on the same cushion, with their hair mingling, they were still beautiful, beautiful as with satisfied passion. Benedetta had kept her divinely gay, loving, and faithful face for eternity, transported with rapture at having rendered up her last breath in a kiss of love; whilst Dario retained a more dolorous expression amidst his final joy. And their eyes were still wide open, gazing at one another with a persistent and caressing sweetness which nothing would ever more disturb.

Oh! God, was it true that yonder lay that Benedetta whom he, Pierre, had loved with such pure, brotherly affection? He was stirred to the very depths of his soul by the recollection of the delightful hours which he had spent with her. She had been so beautiful, so sensible, yet so full of passion! And he had indulged in so beautiful a dream, that of animating with his own liberating fraternal feelings that admirable creature with soul of fire and indolent air, in whom he had pictured all ancient Rome, and whom he would have liked to awaken and win over to the Italy of to-morrow. He had dreamt of enlarging her brain and heart by filling her with love for the lowly and the poor, with all present-day compassion for things and beings. How he would now have smiled at such a dream had not his tears been flowing!

Yet how charming she had shown herself in striving to content him despite the invincible obstacles of race, education, and environment. She had been a docile pupil, but was incapable of any real progress. One day she had certainly seemed to draw nearer to him, as though her own sufferings had opened her soul to every charity ; but the illusion of happiness had come back, and then she had lost all understanding of the woes of others, and had gone off in the egotism of her own hope and joy. Did that mean then that this Roman race must finish in that fashion, beautiful as it still often is, and fondly adored but so closed to all love for others, to those laws of charity and justice which, by regulating labour, can henceforth alone save this world of ours ?

Then there came another great sorrow to Pierre which left him stammering, unable to speak any precise prayer. He thought of the overwhelming reassertion of Nature's powers which had attended the death of those two poor children. Was it not awful ? To have taken that vow to the Virgin, to have endured torment throughout life, and to end by plunging into death, on the loved one's neck, distracted by vain regret and eager for self-bestowal ! The brutal fact of impending separation had sufficed for Benedetta to realise how she had duped herself, and to revert to the universal instinct of love. And therein, again once more, was the Church vanquished ; therein again appeared the great god Pan, mating the sexes and scattering life around ! If in the days of the Renaissance the Church did not fall beneath the assault of the Venuses and Hercules then exhumed from the old

soil of Rome, the struggle at all events continued as bitterly as ever; and at each and every hour new nations, overflowing with sap, hungering for life, and warring against a religion which was nothing more than an appetite for death, threatened to sweep away that old Holy Apostolic Roman and Catholic edifice whose walls were already tottering on all sides.

And at that moment Pierre felt that the death of that adorable Benedetta was for him the supreme disaster. He was still looking at her and tears were scorching his eyes. She was carrying off his chimera. This time 'twas really the end. Rome the Catholic and the Princely was dead, lying there like marble on that funeral bed. She had been unable to go to the humble, the suffering ones of the world, and had just expired amidst the impotent cry of her egotistical passion when it was too late either to love or to create. Never more would children be born of her, the old Roman house was henceforth empty, sterile, beyond possibility of awakening. Pierre whose soul mourned such a splendid dream, was so grieved at seeing her thus motionless and frigid, that he felt himself fainting. He feared lest he might fall upon the step beside the bed, and so struggled to his feet and drew aside.

Then, as he sought refuge in a window recess in order that he might try to recover self-possession, he was astonished to perceive Victorine seated there on a bench which the hangings half concealed. She had come thither by Donna Serafina's orders, and sat watching her two dear children as she called them, whilst keeping an eye upon all who came in and went out. And, on seeing the young priest so pale and nearly

swooning, she at once made room for him to sit down beside her. "Ah!" he murmured after drawing a long breath, "may they at least have the joy of being together elsewhere, of living a new life in another world."

Victorine, however, shrugged her shoulders, and in an equally low voice responded, "Oh! live again, Monsieur l'Abbé, why? When one's dead the best is to remain so and to sleep. Those poor children had enough torments on earth, one mustn't wish that they should begin again elsewhere."

This naïve yet deep remark on the part of an ignorant unbelieving woman sent a shudder through Pierre's very bones. To think that his own teeth had chattered with fear at night time at the sudden thought of annihilation. He deemed her heroic at remaining so undisturbed by any ideas of eternity and the infinite. And she, as she felt he was quivering, went on: "What can you suppose there should be after death? We've deserved a right to sleep, and nothing to my thinking can be more desirable and consoling."

"But those two did not live," murmured Pierre, "so why not allow oneself the joy of believing that they now live elsewhere, recompensed for all their torments?"

Victorine, however, again shook her head; "No, no," she replied. "Ah! I was quite right in saying that my poor Benedetta did wrong in torturing herself with all those superstitious ideas of hers when she was really so fond of her lover. Yes, happiness is rarely found, and how one regrets having missed it when it's too late to turn back! That's the whole story of those

poor little ones. It's too late for them, they are dead." Then in her turn she broke down and began to sob. "Poor little ones! poor little ones! Look how white they are, and think what they will be when only the bones of their heads lie side by side on the cushion, and only the bones of their arms still clasp one another. Ah! may they sleep, may they sleep; at least they know nothing and feel nothing now."

A long interval of silence followed. Pierre, amidst the quiver of his own doubts, the anxious desire which in common with most men he felt for a new life beyond the grave, gazed at this woman who did not find priests to her fancy, and who retained all her Beauceronne frankness of speech, with the tranquil, contented air of one who has ever done her duty in her humble station as a servant, lost though she had been for five and twenty years in a land of wolves, whose language she had not even been able to learn. Ah! yes, tortured as the young man was by his doubts, he would have liked to be as she was, a well-balanced, healthy, ignorant creature who was quite content with what the world offered, and who, when she had accomplished her daily task, went fully satisfied to bed, careless as to whether she might never wake again!

However, as Pierre's eyes once more sought the state bed, he suddenly recognised the old priest, who was kneeling on the step of the platform, and whose features he had hitherto been unable to distinguish. "Isn't that Abbé Pisoni, the priest of Santa Brigida, where I sometimes said mass?" he inquired. "The poor old man, how he weeps!"

In her quiet yet desolate voice Victorine replied,

"He has good reason to weep. He did a fine thing when he took it into his head to marry my poor Benedetta to Count Prada. All those abominations would never have happened if the poor child had been given her Dario at once. But in this idiotic city they are all mad with their politics; and that old priest, who is none the less a very worthy man, thought he had accomplished a real miracle and saved the world by marrying the Pope and the King as he said with a soft laugh, poor old *savant* that he is, who for his part has never been in love with anything but old stones — you know, all that antiquated rubbish of theirs of a hundred thousand years ago. And now, you see, he can't keep from weeping. The other one too came not twenty minutes ago, Father Lorenza, the Jesuit who became the Contessina's confessor after Abbé Pisoni, and who undid what the other had done. Yes, a handsome man he is, but a fine bungler all the same, a perfect killjoy with all the crafty hindrances which he brought into that divorce affair. I wish you had been here to see what a big sign of the cross he made after he had knelt down. He didn't cry, he didn't: he seemed to be saying that as things had ended so badly it was evident that God had withdrawn from all share in the business. So much the worse for the dead!"

Victorine spoke gently and without a pause, as it relieved her, to empty her heart after the terrible hours of bustle and suffocation which she had spent since the previous day. "And that one yonder," she resumed in a lower voice, "don't you recognise her?"

She glanced towards the poorly clad girl whom Pierre had taken for a servant, and whom intensity

of grief had prostrated beside the bed. With a gesture of awful suffering this girl had just thrown back her head, a head of extraordinary beauty, enveloped by superb black hair.

"La Pierina!" said Pierre. "Ah! poor girl."

Victorine made a gesture of compassion and tolerance.

"What would you have?" said she, "I let her come up. I don't know how she heard of the trouble, but it's true that she is always prowling round the house. She sent and asked me to come down to her, and you should have heard her sob and entreat me to let her see her Prince once more! Well, she does no harm to anybody there on the floor, looking at them both with her beautiful loving eyes full of tears. She's been there for half an hour already, and I had made up my mind to turn her out if she didn't behave properly. But since she's so quiet and doesn't even move, she may well stop and fill her heart with the sight of them for her whole life long."

It was really sublime to see that ignorant, passionate, beautiful Pierina thus overwhelmed below the nuptial couch on which the lovers slept for all eternity. She had sunk down on her heels, her arms hanging heavily beside her, and her hands open. And with raised face, motionless as in an ecstasy of suffering, she did not take her eyes from that adorable and tragic pair. Never had human face displayed such beauty, such a dazzling splendour of suffering and love; never had there been such a portrayal of ancient Grief, not however cold like marble but quivering with life. What was she thinking of, what

were her sufferings, as she thus fixedly gazed at her Prince now and for ever locked in her rival's arms? Was it some jealousy which could have no end that chilled the blood of her veins? Or was it mere suffering at having lost him, at realising that she was looking at him for the last time, without thought of hatred for that other woman who vainly sought to warm him with her arms as icy cold as his own? There was still a soft gleam in the poor girl's blurred eyes, and her lips were still lips of love though curved in bitterness by grief. She found the lovers so pure and beautiful as they lay there amidst that profusion of flowers! And beautiful herself, beautiful like a queen, ignorant of her own charms, she remained there breathless, a humble servant, a loving slave as it were, whose heart had been wrenched away and carried off by her dying master.

People were now constantly entering the room, slowly approaching with mournful faces, then kneeling and praying for a few minutes, and afterwards retiring with the same mute, desolate mien. A pang came to Pierre's heart when he saw Dario's mother, the ever beautiful Flavia, enter, accompanied by her husband, the handsome Jules Laporte, that ex-sergeant of the Swiss Guard whom she had turned into a Marquis Montefiori. Warned of the tragedy directly it had happened, she had already come to the mansion on the previous evening; but now she returned in grand ceremony and full mourning, looking superb in her black garments which were well suited to her massive, Juno-like style of beauty. When she had approached the bed with a queenly step, she remained

for a moment standing with two tears at the edges of her eyelids, tears which did not fall. Then, at the moment of kneeling, she made sure that Jules was beside her, and glanced at him as if to order him to kneel as well. They both sank down beside the platform and remained in prayer for the proper interval, she very dignified in her grief and he even surpassing her; with the perfect sorrow-stricken bearing of a man who knew how to conduct himself in every circumstance of life, even the gravest. And afterwards they rose together, and slowly betook themselves to the entrance of the private apartments where the Cardinal and Donna Serafina were receiving their relatives and friends.

Five ladies then came in one after the other, while two Capuchins and the Spanish ambassador to the Holy See went off. And Victorine, who for a few minutes had remained silent, suddenly resumed. "Ah! there's the little Princess, she's much afflicted too, and, no wonder, she was so fond of our Benedetta."

Pierre himself had just noticed Celia coming in. She also had attired herself in full mourning for this abominable visit of farewell. Behind her was a maid, who carried on either arm a huge sheaf of white roses.

"The dear girl!" murmured Victorine, "she wanted her wedding with her Attilio to take place on the same day as that of the poor lovers who lie there. And they, alas! have forestalled her, their wedding's over; there they sleep in their bridal bed."

Celia had at once crossed herself and knelt down

beside the bed, but it was evident that she was not praying. She was indeed looking at the lovers with desolate stupefaction at finding them so white and cold with a beauty as of marble. What! had a few hours sufficed, had life departed, would those lips never more exchange a kiss! She could again see them at the ball of that other night, so resplendent and triumphant with their living love. And a feeling of furious protest rose from her young heart, so open to life, so eager for joy and sunlight, so angry with the hateful idiocy of death. And her anger and affright and grief, as she thus found herself face to face with the annihilation which chills every passion, could be read on her ingenuous, candid, lily-like face. She herself stood on the threshold of a life of passion of which she yet knew nothing, and behold! on that very threshold she encountered the corpses of those dearly loved ones, the loss of whom racked her soul with grief.

She gently closed her eyes and tried to pray, whilst big tears fell from under her lowered eyelids. Some time went by amidst the quivering silence, which only the murmur of the mass near by disturbed. At last she rose and took the sheaves of flowers from her maid; and standing on the platform she hesitated for a moment, then placed the roses to the right and left of the cushion on which the lovers' heads were resting, as if she wished to crown them with those blossoms, perfume their young brows with that sweet and powerful aroma. Then, though her hands remained empty she did not retire, but remained there leaning over the dead ones, trembling and seeking what she

might yet say to them, what she might leave them of herself for ever more. An inspiration came to her, and she stooped forward, and with her whole, deep, loving soul set a long, long kiss on the brow of either spouse.

"Ah! the dear girl!" said Victorine, whose tears were again flowing. "You saw that she kissed them, and nobody had yet thought of that, not even the poor young Prince's mother. Ah! the dear little heart, she surely thought of her Attilio."

However, as Celia turned to descend from the platform she perceived La Pierina, whose figure was still thrown back in an attitude of mute and dolorous adoration. And she recognised the girl and melted with pity on seeing such a fit of sobbing come over her that her whole body, her goddess-like hips and bosom, shook as with frightful anguish. That agony of love quite upset the little Princess, and she could be heard murmuring in a tone of infinite compassion, "Calm yourself, my dear, calm yourself. Be reasonable, my dear, I beg you."

Then as La Pierina, thunderstruck at thus being pitied and succoured, began to sob yet more loudly so as to create quite a stir in the room, Celia raised her and held her up with both arms, for fear lest she should fall again. And she led her away in a sisterly clasp, like a sister of affection and despair, lavishing the most gentle, consoling words upon her as they went.

"Follow them, go and see what becomes of them," Victorine said to Pierre. "I do not want to stir from here, it quiets me to watch over my two poor children."

A Capuchin was just beginning a fresh mass at the improvised altar, and the low Latin psalmody went on again, while in the adjoining ante-chamber, where another mass was being celebrated, a bell was heard tinkling for the elevation of the host. The perfume of the flowers was becoming more violent and oppressive amidst the motionless and mournful atmosphere of the spacious throne-room. The four servants standing at the head of the bed, as for a *gala* reception, did not stir, and the procession of visitors ever continued, men and women entering in silence, suffocating there for a moment, and then withdrawing, carrying away with them the never-to-be-forgotten vision of the two tragic lovers sleeping their eternal sleep.

Pierre joined Celia and La Pierina in the *anticamera nobile*, where stood Don Vigilio. The few seats belonging to the throne-room had there been placed in a corner, and the little Princess had just compelled the work-girl to sit down in an arm-chair, in order that she might recover self-possession. Celia was in ecstasy before her, enraptured at finding her so beautiful, more beautiful than any other, as she said. Then she spoke of the two dead ones, who also had seemed to her very beautiful, endowed with an extraordinary beauty, at once superb and sweet; and despite all her tears, she still remained in a transport of admiration. On speaking with La Pierina, Pierre learnt that her brother Tito was at the hospital in great danger from the effects of a terrible knife thrust dealt him in the side; and since the beginning of the winter, said the girl, the misery in the district of the castle fields had

become frightful. It was a source of great suffering to every one, and those whom death carried off had reason to rejoice.

Celia, however, with a gesture of invincible hopefulness, brushed all idea of suffering, even of death, aside. "No, no, we must live," she said. "And beauty is sufficient for life. Come, my dear, do not remain here, do not weep any more; live for the delight of being beautiful."

Then she led La Pierina away, and Pierre remained seated in one of the arm-chairs, overcome by such sorrow and weariness that he would have liked to remain there for ever. Don Vigilio was still bowing to each fresh visitor that arrived. A severe attack of fever had come on him during the night, and he was shivering from it, with his face very yellow, and his eyes ablaze and haggard. He constantly glanced at Pierre, as if anxious to speak to him, but his dread lest he should be seen by Abbé Paparelli, who stood in the next ante-room, the door of which was wide open, doubtless restrained him, for he did not cease to watch the train-bearer. At last the latter was compelled to absent himself for a moment, and the secretary thereupon approached the young Frenchman.

"You saw his Holiness last night," he said; and as Pierre gazed at him in stupefaction he added: "Oh! everything gets known, I told you so before. Well, and you purely and simply withdrew your book, did you not?" The young priest's increasing stupor was sufficient answer, and without leaving him time to reply, Don Vigilio went on: "I suspected it, but I wished to make certain. Ah! that's just the way

they work! Do you believe me now, have you realised that they stifle those whom they don't poison?"

He was no doubt referring to the Jesuits. However, after glancing into the adjoining room to make sure that Abbé Paparelli had not returned thither, he resumed: "And what has Monsignor Nani just told you?"

"But I have not yet seen Monsignor Nani," was Pierre's reply.

"Oh! I thought you had. He passed through before you arrived. If you did not see him in the throne-room he must have gone to pay his respects to Donna Serafina and his Eminence. However, he will certainly pass this way again; you will see him by and by." Then with the bitterness of one who was weak, ever terror-smitten and vanquished, Don Vigilio added: "I told you that you would end by doing what Monsignor Nani desired."

With these words, fancying that he heard the light footfall of Abbé Paparelli, he hastily returned to his place and bowed to two old ladies who just then walked in. And Pierre, still seated, overcome, his eyes wearily closing, at last saw the figure of Nani arise before him in all its reality so typical of sovereign intelligence and address. He remembered what Don Vigilio, on the famous night of his revelations, had told him of this man who was far too shrewd to have labelled himself, so to say, with an unpopular robe, and who, withal, was a charming prelate with thorough knowledge of the world, acquired by long experience at different nunciatures and at the Holy Office, mixed up in everything, informed with regard

to everything, one of the heads, one of the chief minds in fact of that modern black army, which by dint of Opportunism hopes to bring this century back to the Church. And all at once, full enlightenment fell on Pierre, he realised by what supple, clever strategy that man had led him to the act which he desired of him, the pure and simple withdrawal of his book, accomplished with every appearance of free will. First there had been great annoyance on Nani's part on learning that the book was being prosecuted, for he feared lest its excitable author might be prompted to some dangerous revolt; then plans had at once been formed, information had been collected concerning this young priest who seemed so capable of schism, he had been urged to come to Rome, invited to stay in an ancient mansion whose very walls would chill and enlighten him. And afterwards had come the ever recurring obstacles, the system of prolonging his sojourn in Rome by preventing him from seeing the Pope, but promising him the much-desired interview when the proper time should come, that is after he had been sent hither and thither and brought into collision with one and all. And finally, when every one and everything had shaken, wearied, and disgusted him, and he was restored once more to his old doubts, there had come the audience for which he had undergone all this preparation, that visit to the Pope which was destined to shatter whatever remained to him of his dream. Pierre could picture Nani smiling at him and speaking to him, declaring that the repeated delays were a favour of Providence, which would enable him to visit Rome, study and understand

things, reflect, and avoid blunders. How delicate and how profound had been the prelate's diplomacy in thus crushing his feelings beneath his reason, appealing to his intelligence to suppress his work without any scandalous struggle as soon as his knowledge of the real Rome should have shown him how supremely ridiculous it was to dream of a new one!

At that moment Pierre perceived Nani in person just coming from the throne-room, and did not feel the irritation and rancour which he had anticipated. On the contrary he was glad when the prelate, in his turn seeing him, drew near and held out his hand. Nani, however, did not wear his wonted smile, but looked very grave, quite grief-stricken. "Ah! my dear son," he said, "what a frightful catastrophe! I have just left his Eminence, he is in tears. It is horrible, horrible!"

He seated himself on one of the chairs, inviting the young priest, who had risen, to do the same; and for a moment he remained silent, weary with emotion no doubt, and needing a brief rest to free himself of the weight of thoughts which visibly darkened his usually bright face. Then, with a gesture, he strove to dismiss that gloom, and recover his amiable cordiality. "Well, my dear son," he began, "you saw his Holiness?"

"Yes, Monseigneur, yesterday evening; and I thank you for your great kindness in satisfying my desire."

Nani looked at him fixedly, and his invincible smile again returned to his lips. "You thank me. . . . I can well see that you behaved sensibly and laid your full submission at his Holiness's feet. I was certain

of it, I did not expect less of your fine intelligence. But, all the same, you render me very happy, for I am delighted to find that I was not mistaken concerning you." And then, setting aside his reserve, the prelate went on: "I never discussed things with you. What would have been the good of it, since facts were there to convince you? And now that you have withdrawn your book a discussion would be still more futile. However, just reflect that if it were possible for you to bring the Church back to her early period, to that Christian community which you have sketched so delightfully, she could only again follow the same evolutions as those in which God the first time guided her; so that, at the end of a similar number of centuries, she would find herself exactly in the position which she occupies to-day. No, what God has done has been well done, the Church such as she is must govern the world, such as it is; it is for her alone to know how she will end by firmly establishing her reign here below. And this is why your attack upon the temporal power was an unpardonable fault, a crime even, for by dispossessing the papacy of her domains you hand her over to the mercy of the nations. Your new religion is but the final downfall of all religion, moral anarchy, the liberty of schism, in a word, the destruction of the divine edifice, that ancient Catholicism which has shown such prodigious wisdom and solidity, which has sufficed for the salvation of mankind till now, and will alone be able to save it to-morrow and always."

Pierre felt that Nani was sincere, pious even, and really unshakable in his faith, loving the Church like

a grateful son, and convinced that she was the only social organisation which could render mankind happy. And if he were bent on governing the world, it was doubtless for the pleasure of governing, but also in the conviction that no one could do so better than himself.

"Oh! certainly," said he, "methods are open to discussion. I desire them to be as affable and humane as possible, as conciliatory as can be with this present century, which seems to be escaping us, precisely because there is a misunderstanding between us. But we shall bring it back, I am sure of it. And that is why, my dear son, I am so pleased to see you return to the fold, thinking as we think, and ready to battle on our side; is that not so?"

In Nani's words the young priest once more found the arguments of Leo XIII. Desiring to avoid a direct reply, for although he now felt no anger the wrenching away of his dream had left him a smarting wound, he bowed, and replied slowly in order to conceal the bitter tremble of his voice: "I repeat, Monseigneur, that I deeply thank you for having amputated my vain illusions with the skill of an accomplished surgeon. A little later, when I shall have ceased to suffer, I shall think of you with eternal gratitude."

Monsignor Nani still looked at him with a smile. He fully understood that this young priest would remain on one side, that as an element of strength he was lost to the Church. What would he do now? Something foolish no doubt. However, the prelate had to content himself with having helped him to

repair his first folly; he could not foresee the future. And he gracefully waved his hand as if to say that sufficient unto the day was the evil thereof.

"Will you allow me to conclude, my dear son?" he at last exclaimed. "Be sensible, your happiness as a priest and a man lies in humility. You will be terribly unhappy if you use the great intelligence which God has given you against Him."

Then with another gesture he dismissed this affair, which was all over, and with which he need busy himself no more. And thereupon the other affair came back to make him gloomy, that other affair which also was drawing to a close, but so tragically, with those two poor children slumbering in the adjoining room. "Ah!" he resumed, "that poor Princess and that poor Cardinal quite upset my heart! Never did catastrophe fall so cruelly on a house. No, no, it is indeed too much, misfortune goes too far — it revolts one's soul!"

Just as he finished a sound of voices came from the second ante-room, and Pierre was thunderstruck to see Cardinal Sanguinetti go by, escorted with the greatest obsequiousness by Abbé Paparelli.

"If your most Reverend Eminence will have the extreme kindness to follow me," the train-bearer was saying, "I will conduct your most Reverend Eminence myself."

"Yes," replied Sanguinetti, "I arrived yesterday evening from Frascati, and when I heard the sad news, I at once desired to express my sorrow and offer consolation."

"Your Eminence will perhaps condescend to remain

for a moment near the bodies. I will afterwards escort your Eminence to the private apartments."

"Yes, by all means. I desire every one to know how greatly I participate in the sorrow which has fallen on this illustrious house."

Then Sanguinetti entered the throne-room, leaving Pierre quite aghast at his quiet audacity. The young priest certainly did not accuse him of direct complicity with Santobono, he did not even dare to measure how far his moral complicity might go. But on seeing him pass by like that, his brow so lofty, his speech so clear, he had suddenly felt convinced that he knew the truth. How or through whom, he could not have told; but doubtless crimes become known in those shady spheres by those whose interest it is to know of them. And Pierre remained quite chilled by the haughty fashion in which that man presented himself, perhaps to stifle suspicion and certainly to accomplish an act of good policy by giving his rival a public mark of esteem and affection.

"The Cardinal! Here!" Pierre murmured despite himself.

Nani, who followed the young man's thoughts in his childish eyes, in which all could be read, pretended to mistake the sense of his exclamation. "Yes," said he, "I learnt that the Cardinal returned to Rome yesterday evening. He did not wish to remain away any longer; the Holy Father being so much better that he might perhaps have need of him."

Although these words were spoken with an air of perfect innocence, Pierre was not for a moment

deceived by them. And having in his turn glanced at the prelate, he was convinced that the latter also knew the truth. Then, all at once, the whole affair appeared to him in its intricacy, in the ferocity which fate had imparted to it. Nani, an old intimate of the Palazzo Boccanera, was not heartless, he had surely loved Benedetta with affection, charmed by so much grace and beauty. One could thus explain the victorious manner in which he had at last caused her marriage to be annulled. But if Don Vigilio were to be believed, that divorce, obtained by pecuniary outlay, and under pressure of the most notorious influences, was simply a scandal which he, Nani, had in the first instance spun out, and then precipitated towards a resounding finish with the sole object of discrediting the Cardinal and destroying his chances of the tiara on the eve of the Conclave which everybody thought imminent. It seemed certain, too, that the Cardinal, uncompromising as he was, could not be the candidate of Nani, who was so desirous of universal agreement, and so the latter's long labour in that house, whilst conducing to the happiness of the Contessina, had been designed to frustrate Donna Serafina and Cardinal Pio in their burning ambition, that third triumphant elevation to the papacy which they sought to secure for their ancient family. However, if Nani had always desired to baulk this ambition, and had even at one moment placed his hopes in Sanguinetti and fought for him, he had never imagined that Boccanera's foes would go to the point of crime, to such an abomination as poison which missed its mark and killed the innocent. No, no, as

he himself said, that was too much, and made one's soul rebel. He employed more gentle weapons; such brutality filled him with indignation; and his face, so pinky and carefully tended, still wore the grave expression of his revolt in presence of the tearful Cardinal and those poor lovers stricken in his stead.

Believing that Sanguinetti was still the prelate's secret candidate, Pierre was worried to know how far their moral complicity in this baleful affair might go. So he resumed the conversation by saying: "It is asserted that his Holiness is on bad terms with his Eminence Cardinal Sanguinetti. Of course the reigning pope cannot look on the future pope with a very kindly eye."

At this, Nani for a moment became quite gay in all frankness. "Oh," said he, "the Cardinal has quarrelled and made things up with the Vatican three or four times already. And, in any event, the Holy Father has no motive for posthumous jealousy; he knows very well that he can give his Eminence a good greeting." Then, regretting that he had thus expressed a certainty, he added: "I am joking, his Eminence is altogether worthy of the high fortune which perhaps awaits him."

Pierre knew what to think however; Sanguinetti was certainly Nani's candidate no longer. It was doubtless considered that he had used himself up too much by his impatient ambition, and was too dangerous by reason of the equivocal alliances which in his feverishness he had concluded with every party, even that of patriotic young Italy. And thus the situation became clearer. Cardinals Sanguinetti and Boccanera

devoured and suppressed one another; the first, ever intriguing, accepting every compromise, dreaming of winning Rome back by electoral methods; and the other, erect and motionless in his stern maintenance of the past, excommunicating the century, and awaiting from God alone the miracle which would save the Church. And, indeed, why not leave the two theories, thus placed face to face, to destroy one another, including all the extreme, disquieting views which they respectively embodied? If Boccanera had escaped the poison, he had none the less become an impossible candidate, killed by all the stories which had set Rome buzzing; while if Sanguinetti could say that he was rid of a rival, he had at the same time dealt a mortal blow to his own candidature, by displaying such passion for power, and such unscrupulousness with regard to the methods he employed, as to be a danger for every one. Monsignor Nani was visibly delighted with this result; neither candidate was left, it was like the legendary story of the two wolves who fought and devoured one another so completely that nothing of either of them was found left, not even their tails! And in the depths of the prelate's pale eyes, in the whole of his discreet person, there remained nothing but redoubtable mystery: the mystery of the yet unknown, but definitively selected candidate who would be patronised by the all-powerful army of which he was one of the most skilful leaders. A man like him always had a solution ready. Who, then, who would be the next pope?

However, he now rose and cordially took leave of the young priest. "I doubt if I shall see you

again, my dear son," he said; "I wish you a good journey."

Still he did not go off, but continued to look at Pierre with his penetrating eyes, and finally made him sit down again and did the same himself. "I feel sure," he said, "that you will go to pay your respects to Cardinal Bergerot as soon as you have returned to France. Kindly tell him that I respectfully desired to be reminded to him. I knew him a little at the time when he came here for his hat. He is one of the great luminaries of the French clergy. Ah! a man of such intelligence would only work for a good understanding in our holy Church. Unfortunately I fear that race and environment have instilled prejudices into him, for he does not always help us."

Pierre, who was surprised to hear Nani speak of the Cardinal for the first time at this moment of farewell, listened with curiosity. Then in all frankness he replied: "Yes, his Eminence has very decided ideas about our old Church of France. For instance, he professes perfect horror of the Jesuits."

With a light exclamation Nani stopped the young man. And he wore the most sincerely, frankly astonished air that could be imagined. "What! horror of the Jesuits! In what way can the Jesuits disquiet him? The Jesuits, there are none, that's all over! Have you seen any in Rome? Have they troubled you in any way, those poor Jesuits who haven't even a stone of their own left here on which to lay their heads? No, no, that bogey mustn't be brought up again, it's childish."

Pierre in his turn looked at him, marvelling at his perfect ease, his quiet courage in dealing with this burning subject. He did not avert his eyes, but displayed an open face like a book of truth. "Ah!" he continued, "if by Jesuits you mean the sensible priests who, instead of entering into sterile and dangerous struggles with modern society, seek by human methods to bring it back to the Church, why, then of course we are all of us more or less Jesuits, for it would be madness not to take into account the times in which one lives. And besides, I won't haggle over words; they are of no consequence! Jesuits, well, yes, if you like, Jesuits!" He was again smiling with that shrewd smile of his in which there was so much raillery and so much intelligence. "Well, when you see Cardinal Bergerot tell him that it is unreasonable to track the Jesuits and treat them as enemies of the nation. The contrary is the truth. The Jesuits are for France, because they are for wealth, strength, and courage. France is the only great Catholic country which has yet remained erect and sovereign, the only one on which the papacy can some day lean. Thus the Holy Father, after momentarily dreaming of obtaining support from victorious Germany, has allied himself with France, the vanquished, because he has understood that apart from France there can be no salvation for the Church. And in this he has only followed the policy of the Jesuits, those frightful Jesuits, whom your Parisians execrate. And tell Cardinal Bergerot also that it would be grand of him to work for pacification by making people understand how wrong it is for your

Republic to help the Holy Father so little in his conciliatory efforts. It pretends to regard him as an element in the world's affairs that may be neglected; and that is dangerous, for although he may seem to have no political means of action he remains an immense moral force, and can at any moment raise consciences in rebellion and provoke a religious agitation of the most far-reaching consequences. It is still he who disposes of the nations, since he disposes of their souls, and the Republic acts most inconsiderately, from the standpoint of its own interests, in showing that it no longer even suspects it. And tell the Cardinal too, that it is really pitiful to see in what a wretched way your Republic selects its bishops, as though it intentionally desired to weaken its episcopacy. Leaving out a few fortunate exceptions, your bishops are men of small brains, and as a result your cardinals, likewise mere mediocrities, have no influence, play no part here in Rome. Ah! what a sorry figure you Frenchmen will cut at the next Conclave! And so why do you show such blind and foolish hatred of those Jesuits, who, politically, are your friends? Why don't you employ their intelligent zeal, which is ready to serve you, so that you may assure yourselves the help of the next, the coming pope? It is necessary for you that he should be on your side, that he should continue the work of Leo XIII, which is so badly judged and so much opposed, but which cares little for the petty results of to-day, since its purpose lies in the future, in the union of all the nations under their holy mother the Church. Tell Cardinal Bergerot, tell him plainly

that he ought to be with us, that he ought to work for his country by working for us. The coming pope, why the whole question lies in that, and woe to France if in him she does not find a continuator of Leo XIII!"

Nani had again risen, and this time he was going off. Never before had he unbosomed himself at such length. But most assuredly he had only said what he desired to say, for a purpose that he alone knew of, and in a firm, gentle, and deliberate voice by which one could tell that each word had been weighed and determined beforehand. "Farewell, my dear son," he said, "and once again think over all you have seen and heard in Rome. Be as sensible as you can, and do not spoil your life."

Pierre bowed, and pressed the small, plump, supple hand which the prelate offered him. "Monseigneur," he replied, "I again thank you for all your kindness; you may be sure that I shall forget nothing of my journey."

Then he watched Nani as he went off, with a light and conquering step as if marching to all the victories of the future. No, no, he, Pierre, would forget nothing of his journey! He well knew that union of all the nations under their holy mother the Church, that temporal bondage in which the law of Christ would become the dictatorship of Augustus, master of the world! And as for those Jesuits, he had no doubt that they did love France, the eldest daughter of the Church, and the only daughter that could yet help her mother to reconquer universal sovereignty, but they loved her even as the black swarms of locusts love

the harvests which they swoop upon and devour. Infinite sadness had returned to the young man's heart as he dimly realised that in that sorely-stricken mansion, in all that mourning and downfall, it was they, they again, who must have been the artisans of grief and disaster.

As this thought came to him he turned round and perceived Don Vigilio leaning against the credence in front of the large portrait of the Cardinal. Holding his hands to his face as if he desired to annihilate himself, the secretary was shivering in every limb as much with fear as with fever. At a moment when no fresh visitors were arriving he had succumbed to an attack of terrified despair.

"*Mon Dieu!* What is the matter with you?" asked Pierre stepping forward, "are you ill, can I help you?"

But Don Vigilio, suffocating and still hiding his face, could only gasp between his close-pressed hands: "Ah! Paparelli, Paparelli!"

"What is it? What has he done to you?" asked the other astonished.

Then the secretary disclosed his face, and again yielded to his quivering desire to confide in some one. "Eh? what he has done to me? Can't you feel anything, can't you see anything then? Didn't you notice the manner in which he took possession of Cardinal Sanguinetti so as to conduct him to his Eminence? To impose that suspected, hateful rival on his Eminence at such a moment as this, what insolent audacity! And a few minutes previously did you notice with what wicked cunning he bowed out an old lady,

a very old family friend, who only desired to kiss his Eminence's hand and show a little real affection which would have made his Eminence so happy! Ah! I tell you that he's the master here, he opens or closes the door as he pleases, and holds us all between his fingers like a pinch of dust which one throws to the wind!"

Pierre became anxious, seeing how yellow and feverish Don Vigilio was: "Come, come, my dear fellow," he said, "you are exaggerating!"

"Exaggerating? Do you know what happened last night, what I myself unwillingly witnessed? No, you don't know it; well, I will tell you."

Thereupon he related that Donna Serafina, on returning home on the previous day to face the terrible catastrophe awaiting her, had already been overcome by the bad news which she had learnt when calling on the Cardinal Secretary and various prelates of her acquaintance. She had then acquired a certainty that her brother's position was becoming extremely bad, for he had made so many fresh enemies among his colleagues of the Sacred College, that his election to the pontifical throne, which a year previously had seemed probable, now appeared an impossibility. Thus, all at once, the dream of her life collapsed, the ambition which she had so long nourished lay in dust at her feet. On despairingly seeking the why and wherefore of this change, she had been told of all sorts of blunders committed by the Cardinal, acts of rough sternness, unseasonable manifestations of opinion, inconsiderate words or actions which had sufficed to wound people, in fact such provoking de-

meanour that one might have thought it adopted with the express intention of spoiling everything. And the worst was that in each of the blunders she had recognised errors of judgment which she herself had blamed, but which her brother had obstinately insisted on perpetrating under the unacknowledged influence of Abbé Paparelli, that humble and insignificant train-bearer, in whom she detected a baneful and powerful adviser who destroyed her own vigilant and devoted influence. And so, in spite of the mourning in which the house was plunged, she did not wish to delay the punishment of the traitor, particularly as his old friendship with that terrible Santobono, and the story of that basket of figs which had passed from the hands of the one to those of the other, chilled her blood with a suspicion which she even recoiled from elucidating. However, at the first words she spoke, directly she made a formal request that the traitor should be immediately turned out of the house, she was confronted by invincible resistance on her brother's part. He would not listen to her, but flew into one of those hurricane-like passions which swept everything away, reproaching her for laying blame on so modest, pious, and saintly a man, and accusing her of playing into the hands of his enemies, who, after killing Monsignor Gallo, were seeking to poison his sole remaining affection for that poor, insignificant priest. He treated all the stories he was told as abominable inventions, and swore that he would keep the train-bearer in his service if only to show his disdain for calumny. And she was thereupon obliged to hold her peace.

However, Don Vigilio's shuddering fit had again come back; he carried his hands to his face stammering: "Ah! Paparelli, Paparelli!" And muttered invectives followed: the train-bearer was an artful hypocrite who feigned modesty and humility, a vile spy appointed to pry into everything, listen to everything, and pervert everything that went on in the palace; he was a loathsome, destructive insect, feeding on the most noble prey, devouring the lion's mane, a Jesuit—the Jesuit who is at once lackey and tyrant, in all his base horror as he accomplishes the work of vermin.

"Calm yourself, calm yourself," repeated Pierre, who whilst allowing for foolish exaggeration on the secretary's part could not help shivering at thought of all the threatening things which he himself could divine astir in the gloom.

However, since Don Vigilio had so narrowly escaped eating those horrible figs, his fright was such that nothing could calm it. Even when he was alone at night, in bed, with his door locked and bolted, sudden terror fell on him and made him hide his head under the sheet and vent stifled cries as if he thought that men were coming through the wall to strangle him. In a faint, breathless voice, as if just emerging from a struggle, he now resumed: "I told you what would happen on the evening when we had a talk together in your room. Although all the doors were securely shut, I did wrong to speak of them to you, I did wrong to ease my heart by telling you all that they were capable of. I was sure they would learn it, and you see they did learn it, since they tried to kill

me. . . . Why it's even wrong of me to tell you this, for it will reach their ears and they won't miss me the next time. Ah! it's all over, I'm as good as dead; this house which I thought so safe will be my tomb."

Pierre began to feel deep compassion for this ailing man, whose feverish brain was haunted by nightmares, and whose life was being finally wrecked by the anguish of persecution mania. "But you must run away in that case!" he said. "Don't stop here; come to France."

Don Vigilio looked at him, momentarily calmed by surprise. "Run away, why? Go to France? Why, they are there! No matter where I might go, they would be there. They are everywhere, I should always be surrounded by them! No, no, I prefer to stay here and would rather die at once if his Eminence can no longer defend me." With an expression of ardent entreaty in which a last gleam of hope tried to assert itself, he raised his eyes to the large painting in which the Cardinal stood forth resplendent in his cassock of red moire; but his attack came back again and overwhelmed him with increased intensity of fever. "Leave me, I beg you, leave me," he gasped. "Don't make me talk any more. Ah! Paparelli, Paparelli! If he should come back and see us and hear me speak. . . . Oh! I'll never say anything again. I'll tie up my tongue, I'll cut it off. Leave me, you are killing me, I tell you, he'll be coming back and that will mean my death. Go away, oh! for mercy's sake, go away!"

Thereupon Don Vigilio turned towards the wall as if to flatten his face against it, and immure his lips in tomb-like silence; and Pierre resolved to leave him to

himself, fearing lest he should provoke a yet more serious attack if he went on endeavouring to succour him.

On returning to the throne-room the young priest again found himself amidst all the frightful mourning. Mass was following mass; without cessation murmured prayers entreated the divine mercy to receive the two dear departed souls with loving kindness. And amidst the dying perfume of the fading roses, in front of the pale stars of the lighted candles, Pierre thought of that supreme downfall of the Boccaneras. Dario was the last of the name, and one could well understand that the Cardinal, whose only sin was family pride, should have loved that one remaining scion by whom alone the old stock might yet blossom afresh. And indeed, if he and Donna Serafina had desired the divorce, and then the marriage of the cousins, it had been less with the view of putting an end to scandal than with the hope of seeing a new line of Boccaneras spring up. But the lovers were dead, and the last remains of a long series of dazzling princes of sword and of gown lay there on that bed, soon to rot in the grave. It was all over; that old maid and that aged Cardinal could leave no posterity. They remained face to face like two withered oaks, sole remnants of a vanished forest, and their fall would soon leave the plain quite clear. And how terrible the grief of surviving in impotence, what anguish to have to tell oneself that one is the end of everything, that with oneself all life, all hope for the morrow will depart! Amidst the murmur of the prayers, the dying perfume of the roses, the pale gleams of the two can-

dles, Pierre realised what a downfall was that bereavement, how heavy was the gravestone which fell for ever on an extinct house, a vanished world.

He well understood that as one of the familiars of the mansion he must pay his respects to Donna Serafina and the Cardinal, and he at once sought admission to the neighbouring room where the Princess was receiving her friends. He found her robed in black, very slim and very erect in her arm-chair, whence she rose with slow dignity to respond to the bow of each person that entered. She listened to the condolences but answered never a word, overcoming her physical pain by rigidity of bearing. Pierre, who had learnt to know her, could divine, however, by the hollowness of her cheeks, the emptiness of her eyes, and the bitter twinge of her mouth, how frightful was the collapse within her. Not only was her race ended, but her brother would never be pope, never secure the elevation which she had so long fancied she was winning for him by dint of devotion, dint of feminine renunciation, giving brain and heart, care and money, foregoing even wifehood and motherhood, spoiling her whole life, in order to realise that dream. And amidst all the ruin of hope, it was perhaps the non-fulfilment of that ambition which most made her heart bleed. She rose for the young priest, her guest, as she rose for the other persons who presented themselves; but she contrived to introduce shades of meaning into the manner in which she quitted her chair, and Pierre fully realised that he had remained in her eyes a mere petty French priest, an insignificant domestic of the Divinity who had not known how

to acquire even the title of prelate. When she had again seated herself after acknowledging his compliment with a slight inclination of the head, he remained for a moment standing, out of politeness. Not a word, not a sound disturbed the mournful quiescence of the room, for although there were four or five lady visitors seated there they remained motionless and silent as with grief. Pierre was most struck, however, by the sight of Cardinal Sarno, who was lying back in an arm-chair with his eyes closed. The poor puny lopsided old man had lingered there forgetfully after expressing his condolences, and, overcome by the heavy silence and close atmosphere, had just fallen asleep. And everybody respected his slumber. Was he dreaming as he dozed of that map of Christendom which he carried behind his low obtuse-looking brow? Was he continuing in dreamland his terrible work of conquest, that task of subjecting and governing the earth which he directed from his dark room at the Propaganda? The ladies glanced at him affectionately and deferentially; he was gently scolded at times for over-working himself, the sleepiness which nowadays frequently overtook him in all sorts of places being attributed to excess of genius and zeal. And of this all-powerful Eminence Pierre was destined to carry off only this last impression: an exhausted old man, resting amidst the emotion of a mourning gathering, sleeping there like a candid child, without any one knowing whether this were due to the approach of senile imbecility, or to the fatigues of a night spent in organising the reign of God over some distant continent.

Two ladies went off and three more arrived. Donna Serafina rose, bowed, and then reseated herself, reverting to her rigid attitude, her bust erect, her face stern and full of despair. Cardinal Sarno was still asleep. Then Pierre felt as if he would stifle, a kind of vertigo came on him, and his heart beat violently. So he bowed and withdrew: and on passing through the dining-room on his way to the little study where Cardinal Boccanera received his visitors, he found himself in the presence of Paparelli who was jealously guarding the door. When the train-bearer had sniffed at the young man, he seemed to realise that he could not refuse him admittance. Moreover, as this intruder was going away the very next day, defeated and covered with shame, there was nothing to be feared from him.

"You wish to see his Eminence?" said Paparelli. "Good, good. By and by, wait." And opining that Pierre was too near the door, he pushed him back to the other end of the room, for fear no doubt lest he should overhear anything. "His Eminence is still engaged with his Eminence Cardinal Sanguinetti. Wait, wait there!"

Sanguinetti indeed had made a point of kneeling for a long time in front of the bodies in the throne-room, and had then spun out his visit to Donna Serafina in order to mark how largely he shared the family sorrow. And for more than ten minutes now he had been closeted with Cardinal Boccanera, nothing but an occasional murmur of their voices being heard through the closed door.

Pierre, however, on finding Paparelli there, was

again haunted by all that Don Vigilio had told him. He looked at the train-bearer, so fat and short, puffed out with bad fat in his dirty cassock, his face flabby and wrinkled, and his whole person at forty years of age suggestive of that of a very old maid: and he felt astonished. How was it that Cardinal Boccanera, that superb prince who carried his head so high, and who was so supremely proud of his name, had allowed himself to be captured and swayed by such a frightful creature reeking of baseness and abomination? Was it not the man's very physical degradation and profound humility that had struck him, disturbed him, and finally fascinated him, as wondrous gifts conducing to salvation, which he himself lacked? Papparelli's person and disposition were like blows dealt to his own handsome presence and his own pride. He, who could not be so deformed, he who could not vanquish his passion for glory, must, by an effort of faith, have grown jealous of that man who was so extremely ugly and so extremely insignificant, he must have come to admire him as a superior force of penitence and human abasement which threw the portals of heaven wide open. Who can ever tell what ascendancy is exercised by the monster over the hero; by the horrid-looking saint covered with vermin over the powerful of this world in their terror at having to endure everlasting flames in payment of their terrestrial joys? And 'twas indeed the lion devoured by the insect, vast strength and splendour destroyed by the invisible. Ah! to have that fine soul which was so certain of paradise, which for its welfare was enclosed in such a disgusting body, to possess the happy

humility of that wide intelligence, that remarkable theologian, who scourged himself with rods each morning on rising, and was content to be the lowest of servants.

Standing there a heap of livid fat, Paparelli on his side watched Pierre with his little grey eyes blinking amidst the myriad wrinkles of his face. And the young priest began to feel uneasy, wondering what their Eminences could be saying to one another, shut up together like that for so long a time. And what an interview it must be if Boccanera suspected Sanguinetti of counting Santobono among his clients. What serene audacity it was on Sanguinetti's part to have dared to present himself in that house, and what strength of soul there must be on Boccanera's part, what empire over himself, to prevent all scandal by remaining silent and accepting the visit as a simple mark of esteem and affection! What could they be saying to one another, however? How interesting it would have been to have seen them face to face, and have heard them exchange the diplomatic phrases suited to such an interview, whilst their souls were raging with furious hatred!

All at once the door opened and Cardinal Sanguinetti appeared with calm face, no ruddier than usual, indeed a trifle paler, and retaining the fitting measure of sorrow which he had thought it right to assume. His restless eyes alone revealed his delight at being rid of a difficult task. And he was going off, all hope, in the conviction that he was the only eligible candidate to the papacy that remained.

Abbé Paparelli had darted forward: "If your Em-

inence will kindly follow me — I will escort your Eminence to the door." Then, turning towards Pierre, he added: "You may go in now."

Pierre watched them walk away, the one so humble behind the other, who was so triumphant. Then he entered the little work-room, furnished simply with a table and three chairs, and in the centre of it he at once perceived Cardinal Boccanera still standing in the lofty, noble attitude which he had assumed to take leave of Sanguinetti, his hated rival to the pontifical throne. And, visibly, Boccanera also believed himself the only possible pope, the one whom the coming Conclave would elect.

However, when the door had been closed, and the Cardinal beheld that young priest, his guest, who had witnessed the death of those two dear children lying in the adjoining room, he was again mastered by emotion, an unexpected attack of weakness in which all his energy collapsed. His human feelings were taking their revenge now that his rival was no longer there to see him. He staggered like an old tree smitten with the axe, and sank upon a chair, stifling with sobs.

And as Pierre, according to usage, was about to stoop and kiss his ring, he raised him and at once made him sit down, stammering in a halting voice: "No, no, my dear son! Seat yourself there, wait — Excuse me, leave me to myself for a moment, my heart is bursting."

He sobbed with his hands to his face, unable to master himself, unable to drive back his grief with those yet vigorous fingers which were pressed to his cheeks and temples.

Tears came into Pierre's eyes, for he also lived through all that woe afresh, and was much upset by the weeping of that tall old man, that saint and prince, usually so haughty, so fully master of himself, but now only a poor, suffering, agonising man, as weak and as lost as a child. However, although the young priest was likewise stifling with grief, he desired to present his condolences, and sought for kindly words by which he might soothe the other's despair. "I beg your Eminence to believe in my profound grief," he said. "I have been overwhelmed with kindness here, and desired at once to tell your Eminence how much that irreparable loss —"

But with a brave gesture the Cardinal silenced him. "No, no, say nothing, for mercy's sake say nothing!"

And silence reigned while he continued weeping, shaken by the struggle he was waging, his efforts to regain sufficient strength to overcome himself. At last he mastered his quiver and slowly uncovered his face, which had again become calm, like that of a believer strong in his faith, and submissive to the will of God. In refusing a miracle, in dealing so hard a blow to that house, God had doubtless had His reasons, and he, the Cardinal, one of God's ministers, one of the high dignitaries of His terrestrial court, was in duty bound to bow to it. The silence lasted for another moment, and then, in a voice which he managed to render natural and cordial, Boccanera said: "You are leaving us, you are going back to France to-morrow, are you not, my dear son?"

"Yes, I shall have the honour to take leave of your

Eminence to-morrow, again thanking your Eminence for your inexhaustible kindness."

"And you have learnt that the Congregation of the Index has condemned your book, as was inevitable?"

"Yes, I obtained the signal favour of being received by his Holiness, and in his presence made my submission and reprobated my book."

The Cardinal's moist eyes again began to sparkle. "Ah! you did that, ah! you did well, my dear son," he said. "It was only your strict duty as a priest, but there are so many nowadays who do not even do their duty! As a member of the Congregation I kept the promise I gave you to read your book, particularly the incriminated pages. And if I afterwards remained neutral, to such a point even as to miss the sitting in which judgment was pronounced, it was only to please my poor, dear niece, who was so fond of you, and who pleaded your cause to me."

Tears were coming into his eyes again, and he paused, feeling that he would once more be overcome if he evoked the memory of that adored and lamented Benedetta. And so it was with a pugnacious bitterness that he resumed: "But what an execrable book it was, my dear son, allow me to tell you so. You told me that you had shown respect for dogma, and I still wonder what aberration can have come over you that you should have been so blind to all consciousness of your offences. Respect for dogma—good Lord! when the entire work is the negation of our holy religion! Did you not realise that by asking for a new religion you absolutely condemned the old one, the only true one, the only good one, the only one that can be

eternal? And that sufficed to make your book the most deadly of poisons, one of those infamous books which in former times were burnt by the hangman, and which one is nowadays compelled to leave in circulation after interdicting them and thereby designating them to evil curiosity, which explains the contagious rottenness of the century. Ah! I well recognised there some of the ideas of our distinguished and poetical relative, that dear Viscount Philibert de la Choue. A man of letters, yes! a man of letters! Literature, mere literature! I beg God to forgive him, for he most surely does not know what he is doing, or whither he is going with his elegiac Christianity for talkative working men and young persons of either sex, to whom scientific notions have given vagueness of soul. And I only feel angry with his Eminence Cardinal Bergerot, for he at any rate knows what he does, and does as he pleases. No, say nothing, do not defend him. He personifies Revolution in the Church, and is against God."

Although Pierre had resolved that he would not reply or argue, he had allowed a gesture of protest to escape him on hearing this furious attack upon the man whom he most respected in the whole world. However, he yielded to Cardinal Boccanera's injunction and again bowed.

"I cannot sufficiently express my horror," the Cardinal roughly continued; "yes, my horror for all that hollow dream of a new religion! That appeal to the most hideous passions which stir up the poor against the rich, by promising them I know not what division of wealth, what community of possession which is

nowadays impossible! That base flattery shown to the lower orders to whom equality and justice are promised but never given, for these can come from God alone, it is only He who can finally make them reign on the day appointed by His almighty power! And there is even that interested charity which people abuse of to rail against Heaven itself and accuse it of iniquity and indifference, that lackadaisical weakening charity and compassion, unworthy of strong firm hearts, for it is as if human suffering were not necessary for salvation, as if we did not become more pure, greater and nearer to the supreme happiness, the more and more we suffer!"

He was growing excited, full of anguish, and superb. It was his bereavement, his heart wound, which thus exasperated him, the great blow which had felled him for a moment, but against which he again rose erect, defying grief, and stubborn in his stoic belief in an omnipotent God, who was the master of mankind, and reserved felicity to those whom He selected. Again, however, he made an effort to calm himself, and resumed in a more gentle voice: "At all events the fold is always open, my dear son, and here you are back in it since you have repented. You cannot imagine how happy it makes me."

In his turn Pierre strove to show himself conciliatory in order that he might not further ulcerate that violent, grief-stricken soul: "Your Eminence," said he, "may be sure that I shall endeavour to remember every one of the kind words which your Eminence has spoken to me, in the same way as I shall remember the fatherly greeting of his Holiness Leo XIII."

This sentence seemed to throw Boccanera into agitation again. At first only murmured, restrained words came from him, as if he were struggling against a desire to question the young priest. "Ah yes! you saw his Holiness, you spoke to him, and he told you I suppose, as he tells all the foreigners who go to pay their respects to him, that he desires conciliation and peace. For my part I now only see him when it is absolutely necessary; for more than a year I have not been received in private audience."

This proof of disfavour, of the covert struggle which as in the days of Pius IX kept the Holy Father and the *Camerlingo* at variance, filled the latter with bitterness. He was unable to restrain himself and spoke out, reflecting no doubt that he had a familiar before him, one whose discretion was certain, and who moreover was leaving Rome on the morrow. "One may go a long way," said he, "with those fine words, peace and conciliation, which are so often void of real wisdom and courage. The terrible truth is that Leo XIII's eighteen years of concessions have shaken everything in the Church, and should he long continue to reign Catholicism would topple over and crumble into dust like a building whose pillars have been undermined."

Interested by this remark, Pierre in his desire for knowledge began to raise objections. "But hasn't his Holiness shown himself very prudent?" he asked; "has he not placed dogma on one side in an impregnable fortress? If he seems to have made concessions on many points, have they not always been concessions in mere matters of form?"

“Matters of form ; ah, yes !” the Cardinal resumed with increasing passion. “He told you, no doubt, as he tells others, that whilst in substance he will make no surrender, he will readily yield in matters of form ! It’s a deplorable axiom, an equivocal form of diplomacy even when it isn’t so much low hypocrisy ! My soul revolts at the thought of that Opportunism, that Jesuitism which makes artifice its weapon, and only serves to cast doubt among true believers, the confusion of a *sauve-qui-peut*, which by and by must lead to inevitable defeat. It is cowardice, the worst form of cowardice, abandonment of one’s weapons in order that one may retreat the more speedily, shame of oneself, assumption of a mask in the hope of deceiving the enemy, penetrating into his camp, and overcoming him by treachery ! No, no, form is everything in a traditional and immutable religion, which for eighteen hundred years has been, is now, and till the end of time will be the very law of God !”

The Cardinal’s feelings so stirred him that he was unable to remain seated, and began to walk about the little room. And it was the whole reign, the whole policy of Leo XIII which he discussed and condemned. “Unity too,” he continued, “that famous unity of the Christian Church which his Holiness talks of bringing about, and his desire for which people turn to his great glory, why, it is only the blind ambition of a conqueror enlarging his empire without asking himself if the new nations that he subjects may not disorganise, adulterate, and impregnate his old and hitherto faithful people with every error. What if all the schismatical nations on returning to the Catholic Church should

so transform it as to kill it and make it a new Church? There is only one wise course, which is to be what one is, and that firmly. Again, isn't there both shame and danger in that pretended alliance with the democracy which in itself gives the lie to the ancient spirit of the papacy? The right of kings is divine, and to abandon the monarchical principle is to set oneself against God, to compound with revolution, and harbour a monstrous scheme of utilising the madness of men the better to establish one's power over them. All republics are forms of anarchy, and there can be no more criminal act, one which must for ever shake the principle of authority, order, and religion itself, than that of recognising a republic as legitimate for the sole purpose of indulging a dream of impossible conciliation. And observe how this bears on the question of the temporal power. He continues to claim it, he makes a point of no surrender on that question of the restoration of Rome; but in reality, has he not made the loss irreparable, has he not definitively renounced Rome, by admitting that nations have the right to drive away their kings and live like wild beasts in the depths of the forest?"

All at once the Cardinal stopped short and raised his arms to Heaven in a burst of holy anger. "Ah! that man, ah! that man who by his vanity and craving for success will have proved the ruin of the Church, that man who has never ceased corrupting everything, dissolving everything, crumbling everything in order to reign over the world which he fancies he will reconquer by those means, why, Almighty God, why hast Thou not already called him to Thee?"

So sincere was the accent in which that appeal to Death was raised, to such a point was hatred magnified by a real desire to save the Deity imperilled here below, that a great shudder swept through Pierre also. He now understood that Cardinal Boccanera who religiously and passionately hated Leo XIII; he saw him in the depths of his black palace, waiting and watching for the Pope's death, that death which as *Camerlingo* he must officially certify. How feverishly he must wait, how impatiently he must desire the advent of the hour, when with his little silver hammer he would deal the three symbolic taps on the skull of Leo XIII, while the latter lay cold and rigid on his bed surrounded by his pontifical Court. Ah! to strike that wall of the brain, to make sure that nothing more would answer from within, that nothing beyond night and silence was left there. And the three calls would ring out: "Gioachino! Gioachino! Gioachino!" And, the corpse making no answer, the *Camerlingo* after waiting for a few seconds would turn and say: "The Pope is dead!"

"Conciliation, however, is the weapon of the times," remarked Pierre, wishing to bring the Cardinal back to the present, "and it is in order to make sure of conquering that the Holy Father yields in matters of form."

"He will not conquer, he will be conquered," cried Boccanera. "Never has the Church been victorious save in stubbornly clinging to its integrality, the immutable eternity of its divine essence. And it would for a certainty fall on the day when it should allow a single stone of its edifice to be touched. Remember the terrible period through which it passed at the

time of the Council of Trent. The Reformation had just deeply shaken it, laxity of discipline and morals was everywhere increasing, there was a rising tide of novelties, ideas suggested by the spirit of evil, unhealthy projects born of the pride of man, running riot in full license. And at the Council itself many members were disturbed, poisoned, ready to vote for the wildest changes, a fresh schism added to all the others. Well, if Catholicism was saved at that critical period, under the threat of such great danger, it was because the majority, enlightened by God, maintained the old edifice intact, it was because with divinely inspired obstinacy it kept itself within the narrow limits of dogma, it was because it made no concession, none, whether in substance or in form! Nowadays the situation is certainly not worse than it was at the time of the Council of Trent. Let us suppose it to be much the same, and tell me if it is not nobler, braver, and safer for the Church to show the courage which she showed before and declare aloud what she is, what she has been, and what she will be. There is no salvation for her otherwise than in her complete, indisputable sovereignty; and since she has always conquered by non-surrender, all attempts to conciliate her with the century are tantamount to killing her!"

The Cardinal had again begun to walk to and fro with thoughtful step. "No, no," said he, "no compounding, no surrender, no weakness! Rather the wall of steel which bars the road, the block of granite which marks the limit of a world! As I told you, my dear son, on the day of your arrival, to try to accom-

moderate Catholicism to the new times is to hasten its end, if really it be threatened, as atheists pretend. And in that way it would die basely and shamefully instead of dying erect, proud, and dignified in its old glorious royalty! Ah! to die standing, denying nought of the past, braving the future and confessing one's whole faith!"

That old man of seventy seemed to grow yet loftier as he spoke, free from all dread of final annihilation, and making the gesture of a hero who defies futurity. Faith had given him serenity of peace; he believed, he knew, he had neither doubt nor fear of the morrow of death. Still his voice was tinged with haughty sadness as he resumed, "God can do all, even destroy His own work should it seem evil in His eyes. But though all should crumble to-morrow, though the Holy Church should disappear among the ruins, though the most venerated sanctuaries should be crushed by the falling stars, it would still be necessary for us to bow and adore God, who after creating the world might thus annihilate it for His own glory. And I wait, submissive to His will, for nothing happens unless He wills it. If really the temples be shaken, if Catholicism be fated to fall to-morrow into dust, I shall be here to act as the minister of death, even as I have been the minister of life! It is certain, I confess it, that there are hours when terrible signs appear to me. Perhaps, indeed, the end of time is nigh, and we shall witness that fall of the old world with which others threaten us. The worthiest, the loftiest are struck down as if Heaven erred, and in them punished the crimes of the world. Have I not myself felt the blast

from the abyss into which all must sink, since my house, for transgressions that I am ignorant of, has been stricken with that frightful bereavement which precipitates it into the gulf which casts it back into night everlasting!"

He again evoked those two dear dead ones who were always present in his mind. Sobs were once more rising in his throat, his hands trembled, his lofty figure quivered with the last revolt of grief. Yes, if God had stricken him so severely by suppressing his race, if the greatest and most faithful were thus punished, it must be that the world was definitively condemned. Did not the end of his house mean the approaching end of all? And in his sovereign pride as priest and as prince, he found a cry of supreme resignation, once more raising his hands on high: "Almighty God, Thy will be done! May all die, all fall, all return to the night of chaos! I shall remain standing in this ruined palace, waiting to be buried beneath its fragments. And if Thy will should summon me to bury Thy holy religion, be without fear, I shall do nothing unworthy to prolong its life for a few days! I will maintain it erect, like myself, as proud, as uncompromising as in the days of all its power. I will yield nothing, whether in discipline, or in rite, or in dogma. And when the day shall come I will bury it with myself, carrying it whole into the grave rather than yielding aught of it, encompassing it with my cold arms to restore it to Thee, even as Thou didst commit it to the keeping of Thy Church. O mighty God and sovereign Master, dispose of me, make me if such be Thy good pleasure

the pontiff of destruction, the pontiff of the death of the world."

Pierre, who was thunderstruck, quivered with fear and admiration at the extraordinary vision this evoked : the last of the popes interring Catholicism. He understood that Boccanera must at times have made that dream ; he could see him in the Vatican, in St. Peter's which the thunderbolts had riven asunder, he could see him erect and alone in the spacious halls whence his terrified, cowardly pontifical Court had fled. Clad in his white cassock, thus wearing white mourning for the Church, he once more descended to the sanctuary, there to wait for heaven to fall on the evening of Time's accomplishment and annihilate the earth. Thrice he raised the large crucifix, overthrown by the supreme convulsions of the soil. Then, when the final crack rent the steps apart, he caught it in his arms and was annihilated with it beneath the falling vaults. And nothing could be more instinct with fierce and kingly grandeur.

Voiceless, but without weakness, his lofty stature invincible and erect in spite of all, Cardinal Boccanera made a gesture dismissing Pierre, who yielding to his passion for truth and beauty found that he alone was great and right, and respectfully kissed his hand.

It was in the throne-room, with closed doors, at nightfall, after the visits had ceased, that the two bodies were laid in their coffin. The religious services had come to an end, and in the close silent atmosphere there only lingered the dying perfume of the roses and the warm odour of the candles. As the latter's pale stars scarcely lighted the spacious room,

some lamps had been brought, and servants held them in their hands like torches. According to custom, all the servants of the house were present to bid a last farewell to the departed.

There was a little delay. Morano, who had been giving himself no end of trouble ever since morning, was forced to run off again as the triple coffin did not arrive. At last it came, some servants brought it up, and then they were able to begin. The Cardinal and Donna Serafina stood side by side near the bed. Pierre also was present, as well as Don Vigilio. It was Victorine who sewed the lovers up in the white silk shroud, which seemed like a bridal robe, the gay pure robe of their union. Then two servants came forward and helped Pierre and Don Vigilio to lay the bodies in the first coffin, of pine wood lined with pink satin. It was scarcely broader than an ordinary coffin, so young and slim were the lovers and so tightly were they clasped in their last embrace. When they were stretched inside they there continued their eternal slumber, their heads half hidden by their odorous, mingling hair. And when this first coffin had been placed in the second one, a leaden shell, and the second had been enclosed in the third, of stout oak, and when the three lids had been soldered and screwed down, the lovers' faces could still be seen through the circular opening, covered with thick glass, which in accordance with the Roman custom had been left in each of the coffins. And then, for ever parted from the living, alone together, they still gazed at one another with their eyes obstinately open, having all eternity before them wherein to exhaust their infinite love.

XVI

ON the following day, on his return from the funeral Pierre lunched alone in his room, having decided to take leave of the Cardinal and Donna Serafina during the afternoon. He was quitting Rome that evening by the train which started at seventeen minutes past ten. There was nothing to detain him any longer; there was only one visit which he desired to make, a visit to old Orlando, with whom he had promised to have a long chat prior to his departure. And so a little before two o'clock he sent for a cab which took him to the Via Venti Settembre. A fine rain had fallen all night, its moisture steeping the city in grey vapour; and though this rain had now ceased the sky remained very dark, and the huge new mansions of the Via Venti Settembre were quite livid, interminably mournful with their balconies ever of the same pattern and their regular and endless rows of windows. The Ministry of Finances, that colossal pile of masonry and sculpture, looked in particular like a dead town, a huge bloodless body whence all life had withdrawn. On the other hand, although all was so gloomy the rain had made the atmosphere milder, in fact it was almost warm, damply and feverishly warm.

In the hall of Prada's little palazzo Pierre was surprised to find four or five gentlemen taking off their

overcoats; however he learnt from a servant that Count Luigi had a meeting that day with some contractors. As he, Pierre, wished to see the Count's father he had only to ascend to the third floor, added the servant. He must knock at the little door on the right-hand side of the landing there.

On the very first landing, however, the priest found himself face to face with the young Count who was there receiving the contractors, and who on recognising him became frightfully pale. They had not met since the tragedy at the Boccanera mansion, and Pierre well realised how greatly his glance disturbed that man, what a troublesome recollection of moral complicity it evoked, and what mortal dread lest he should have guessed the truth.

"Have you come to see me, have you something to tell me?" the Count inquired.

"No, I am leaving Rome, I have come to wish your father good-bye."

Prada's pallor increased at this, and his whole face quivered: "Ah! it is to see my father. He is not very well, be gentle with him," he replied, and as he spoke, his look of anguish clearly proclaimed what he feared from Pierre, some imprudent word, perhaps even a final mission, the malediction of that man and woman whom he had killed. And surely if his father knew, he would die as well. "Ah! how annoying it is," he resumed, "I can't go up with you! There are gentlemen waiting for me. Yes, how annoyed I am. As soon as possible, however, I will join you, yes, as soon as possible."

He knew not how to stop the young priest, whom

he must evidently allow to remain with his father, whilst he himself stayed down below, kept there by his pecuniary worries. But how distressful were the eyes with which he watched Pierre climb the stairs, how he seemed to supplicate him with his whole quivering form. His father, good Lord, the only true love, the one great, pure, faithful passion of his life!

"Don't make him talk too much, brighten him, won't you?" were his parting words.

Up above it was not Bastista, the devoted ex-soldier, who opened the door, but a very young fellow to whom Pierre did not at first pay any attention. The little room was bare and light as on previous occasions, and from the broad curtainless window there was the superb view of Rome, Rome crushed that day beneath a leaden sky and steeped in shade of infinite mournfulness. Old Orlando, however, had in no wise changed, but still displayed the superb head of an old blanché lion, a powerful muzzle and youthful eyes, which yet sparkled with the passions which had growled in a soul of fire. Pierre found the stricken hero in the same arm-chair as previously, near the same table littered with newspapers, and with his legs buried in the same black wrapper, as if he were there immobilised in a sheath of stone, to such a point that after months and years one was sure to perceive him quite unchanged, with living bust, and face glowing with strength and intelligence.

That grey day, however, he seemed gloomy, low in spirits. "Ah! so here you are, my dear Monsieur Froment," he exclaimed, "I have been thinking of you these three days past, living the awful days

which you must have lived in that tragic Palazzo Boccanera. Ah, God! What a frightful bereavement! My heart is quite overwhelmed, these newspapers have again just upset me with the fresh details they give!" He pointed as he spoke to the papers scattered over the table. Then with a gesture he strove to brush aside the gloomy story, and banish that vision of Benedetta dead, which had been haunting him. "Well, and yourself?" he inquired.

"I am leaving this evening," replied Pierre, "but I did not wish to quit Rome without pressing your brave hands."

"You are leaving? But your book?"

"My book—I have been received by the Holy Father, I have made my submission and reprobated my book."

Orlando looked fixedly at the priest. There was a short interval of silence, during which their eyes told one another all that they had to tell respecting the affair. Neither felt the necessity of any longer explanation. The old man merely spoke these concluding words: "You have done well, your book was a chimera."

"Yes, a chimera, a piece of childishness, and I have condemned it myself in the name of truth and reason."

A smile appeared on the dolorous lips of the impotent hero. "Then you have seen things, you understand and know them now?"

"Yes, I know them; and that is why I did not wish to go off without having that frank conversation with you which we agreed upon."

Orlando was delighted, but all at once he seemed to

remember the young fellow who had opened the door to Pierre, and who had afterwards modestly resumed his seat on a chair near the window. This young fellow was a youth of twenty, still beardless, of a *blonde* handsomeness such as occasionally flowers at Naples, with long curly hair, a lily-like complexion, a rosy mouth, and soft eyes full of a dreamy languor. The old man presented him in fatherly fashion, Angiolo Mascara his name was, and he was the grandson of an old comrade in arms, the epic Mascara of the Thousand, who had died like a hero, his body pierced by a hundred wounds.

"I sent for him to scold him," continued Orlando with a smile. "Do you know that this fine fellow with his girlish airs goes in for the new ideas? He is an Anarchist, one of the three or four dozen Anarchists that we have in Italy. He's a good little lad at bottom, he has only his mother left him, and supports her, thanks to the little berth which he holds, but which he'll lose one of these fine days if he is not careful. Come, come, my child, you must promise me to be reasonable."

Thereupon Angiolo, whose clean but well-worn garments bespoke decent poverty, made answer in a grave and musical voice: "I am reasonable, it is the others, all the others who are not. When all men are reasonable and desire truth and justice, the world will be happy."

"Ah! if you fancy that he'll give way!" cried Orlando. "But, my poor child, just ask Monsieur l'Abbé if one ever knows where truth and justice are. Well, well, one must leave you the time to live, and see, and understand things."

Then, paying no more attention to the young man, he returned to Pierre, while Angiolo, remaining very quiet in his corner, kept his eyes ardently fixed on them, and with open, quivering ears lost not a word they said.

"I told you, my dear Monsieur Froment," resumed Orlando, "that your ideas would change, and that acquaintance with Rome would bring you to accurate views far more readily than any fine speeches I could make to you. So I never doubted but what you would of your own free will withdraw your book as soon as men and things should have enlightened you respecting the Vatican at the present day. But let us leave the Vatican on one side, there is nothing to be done but to let it continue falling slowly and inevitably into ruin. What interests me is our Italian Rome, which you treated as an element to be neglected, but which you have now seen and studied, so that we can both speak of it with the necessary knowledge!"

He thereupon at once granted a great many things, acknowledged that blunders had been committed, that the finances were in a deplorable state, and that there were serious difficulties of all kinds. They, the Italians, had sinned by excess of legitimate pride, they had proceeded too hastily with their attempt to improve a great nation, to change ancient Rome into a great modern capital as by the mere touch of a wand. And thence had come that mania for erecting new districts, that mad speculation in land and shares, which had brought the country within a hair's breadth of bankruptcy.

At this Pierre gently interrupted him to tell him of

the view which he himself had arrived at after his peregrinations and studies through Rome. "That fever of the first hour, that financial *débâcle*," said he, "is after all nothing. All pecuniary sores can be healed. But the grave point is that your Italy still remains to be created. There is no aristocracy left, and as yet there is no people, nothing but a devouring middle class, dating from yesterday, which preys on the rich harvest of the future before it is ripe."

Silence fell. Orlando sadly wagged his old leonine head. The cutting harshness of Pierre's formula struck him in the heart. "Yes, yes," he said at last, "that is so, you have seen things plainly; and why say no when facts are there, patent to everybody? I myself had already spoken to you of that middle class which hungers so ravenously for place and office, distinctions and plumes, and which at the same time is so avaricious, so suspicious with regard to its money which it invests in banks, never risking it in agriculture or manufactures or commerce, having indeed the one desire to enjoy life without doing anything, and so unintelligent that it cannot see it is killing its country by its loathing for labour, its contempt for the poor, its one ambition to live in a petty way with the barren glory of belonging to some official administration. And, as you say, the aristocracy is dying, discrowned, ruined, sunk into the degeneracy which overtakes races towards their close, most of its members reduced to beggary, the others, the few who have clung to their money, crushed by heavy imposts, possessing nought but dead fortunes which constant sharing diminishes and which must soon disappear

with the princes themselves. And then there is the people, which has suffered so much and suffers still, but is so used to suffering that it can seemingly conceive no idea of emerging from it, blind and deaf as it is, almost regretting its ancient bondage, and so ignorant, so abominably ignorant, which is the one cause of its hopeless, morrowless misery, for it has not even the consolation of understanding that if we have conquered and are trying to resuscitate Rome and Italy in their ancient glory, it is for itself, the people, alone. Yes, yes, no aristocracy left, no people as yet, and a middle class which really alarms one. How can one therefore help yielding at times to the terrors of the pessimists, who pretend that our misfortunes are as yet nothing, that we are going forward to yet more awful catastrophes, as though, indeed, what we now behold were but the first symptoms of our race's end, the premonitory signs of final annihilation!"

As he spoke he raised his long quivering arms towards the window, towards the light, and Pierre, deeply moved, remembered how Cardinal Boccanera on the previous day had made a similar gesture of supplicant distress when appealing to the divine power. And both men, Cardinal and patriot, so hostile in their beliefs, were instinct with the same fierce and despairing grandeur.

"As I told you, however, on the first day," continued Orlando, "we only sought to accomplish logical and inevitable things. As for Rome, with her past history of splendour and domination which weighs so heavily upon us, we could not do otherwise than take her for capital, for she alone was the bond, the living symbol

of our unity at the same time as the promise of eternity, the renewal offered to our great dream of resurrection and glory."

He went on, recognising the disastrous conditions under which Rome laboured as a capital. She was a purely decorative city with exhausted soil, she had remained apart from modern life, she was unhealthy, she offered no possibility of commerce or industry, she was invincibly preyed upon by death, standing as she did amidst that sterile desert of the Campagna. Then he compared her with the other cities which are jealous of her; first Florence, which, however, has become so indifferent and so sceptical, impregnated with a happy heedlessness which seems inexplicable when one remembers the frantic passions, and the torrents of blood rolling through her history; next Naples, which yet remains content with her bright sun, and whose childish people enjoy their ignorance and wretchedness so indolently that one knows not whether one ought to pity them; next Venice, which has resigned herself to remaining a marvel of ancient art, which one ought to put under glass so as to preserve her intact, slumbering amid the sovereign pomp of her annals; next Genoa, which is absorbed in trade, still active and bustling, one of the last queens of that Mediterranean, that insignificant lake which was once the opulent central sea, whose waters carried the wealth of the world; and then particularly Turin and Milan, those industrial and commercial centres, which are so full of life and so modernised that tourists disdain them as not being "Italian" cities, both of them having saved themselves from ruin by entering into

that Western evolution which is preparing the next century. Ah! that old land of Italy, ought one to leave it all as a dusty museum for the pleasure of artistic souls, leave it to crumble away, even as its little towns of Magna Græcia, Umbria, and Tuscany are already crumbling, like exquisite *bibelots* which one dares not repair for fear that one might spoil their character. At all events, there must either be death, death soon and inevitable, or else the pick of the demolisher, the tottering walls thrown to the ground, and cities of labour, science, and health created on all sides; in one word, a new Italy really rising from the ashes of the old one, and adapted to the new civilisation into which humanity is entering.

“However, why despair?” Orlando continued energetically. “Rome may weigh heavily on our shoulders, but she is none the less the summit we coveted. We are here, and we shall stay here awaiting events. Even if the population does not increase it at least remains stationary at a figure of some 400,000 souls, and the movement of increase may set in again when the causes which stopped it shall have ceased. Our blunder was to think that Rome would become a Paris or Berlin; but, so far, all sorts of social, historical, even ethnical considerations seem opposed to it; yet who can tell what may be the surprises of to-morrow? Are we forbidden to hope, to put faith in the blood which courses in our veins, the blood of the old conquerors of the world? I, who no longer stir from this room, impotent as I am, even I at times feel my madness come back, believe in the invincibility and immortality of Rome, and wait for the two millions of

people who must come to populate those dolorous new districts which you have seen so empty and already falling into ruins! And certainly they will come! Why not? You will see, you will see, everything will be populated, and even more houses will have to be built. Moreover, can you call a nation poor, when it possesses Lombardy? Is there not also inexhaustible wealth in our southern provinces? Let peace settle down, let the South and the North mingle together, and a new generation of workers grow up. Since we have the soil, such a fertile soil, the great harvest which is awaited will surely some day sprout and ripen under the burning sun!"

Enthusiasm was upbuoying him, all the *furia* of youth inflamed his eyes. Pierre smiled, won over; and as soon as he was able to speak, he said: "The problem must be tackled down below, among the people. You must make men!"

"Exactly!" cried Orlando. "I don't cease repeating it, one must make Italy. It is as if a wind from the East had blown the seed of humanity, the seed which makes vigorous and powerful nations, elsewhere. Our people is not like yours in France, a reservoir of men and money from which one can draw as plentifully as one pleases. It is such another inexhaustible reservoir that I wish to see created among us. And one must begin at the bottom. There must be schools everywhere, ignorance must be stamped out, brutishness and idleness must be fought with books, intellectual and moral instruction must give us the industrious people which we need if we are not to disappear from among the great nations. And once

again for whom, if not for the democracy of to-morrow, have we worked in taking possession of Rome? And how easily one can understand that all should collapse here, and nothing grow up vigorously since such a democracy is absolutely absent. Yes, yes, the solution of the problem does not lie elsewhere; we must make a people, make an Italian democracy."

Pierre had grown calm again, feeling somewhat anxious yet not daring to say that it is by no means easy to modify a nation, that Italy is such as soil, history, and race have made her, and that to seek to transform her so radically and all at once might be a dangerous enterprise. Do not nations like beings have an active youth, a resplendent prime, and a more or less prolonged old age ending in death? A modern democratic Rome, good heavens! The modern Romes are named Paris, London, Chicago. So he contented himself with saying: "But pending this great renovation of the people, don't you think that you ought to be prudent? Your finances are in such a bad condition, you are passing through such great social and economic difficulties, that you run the risk of the worst catastrophes before you secure either men or money. Ah! how prudent would that minister be who should say in your Chamber: 'Our pride has made a mistake, it was wrong of us to try to make ourselves a great nation in one day; more time, labour, and patience are needed; and we consent to remain for the present a young nation, which will quietly reflect and labour at self-formation, without, for a long time yet, seeking to play a dominant part. So we intend to disarm, to strike out the war and naval estimates,

all the estimates intended for display abroad, in order to devote ourselves to our internal prosperity, and to build up by education, physically and morally, the great nation which we swear we will be fifty years hence!' Yes, yes, strike out all needless expenditure, your salvation lies in that!"

But Orlando, while listening, had become gloomy again, and with a vague, weary gesture he replied in an undertone: "No, no, the minister who should use such language would be hooted. It would be too hard a confession, such as one cannot ask a nation to make. Every heart would bound, leap forth at the idea. And, besides, would not the danger perhaps be even greater if all that has been done were allowed to crumble? How many wrecked hopes, how much discarded, useless material there would be! No, we can now only save ourselves by patience and courage—and forward, ever forward! We are a very young nation, and in fifty years we desired to effect the unity which others have required two hundred years to arrive at. Well, we must pay for our haste, we must wait for the harvest to ripen, and fill our barns." Then, with another and more sweeping wave of the arm, he stubbornly strengthened himself in his hopes. "You know," said he, "that I was always against the alliance with Germany. As I predicted, it has ruined us. We were not big enough to march side by side with such a wealthy and powerful person, and it is in view of a war, always near at hand and inevitable, that we now suffer so cruelly from having to support the budgets of a great nation. Ah! that war which has never come, it is that which has exhausted the

best part of our blood and sap and money without the slightest profit. To-day we have nothing before us but the necessity of breaking with our ally, who speculated on our pride, who has never helped us in any way, who has never given us anything but bad advice, and treated us otherwise than with suspicion. But it was all inevitable, and that's what people won't admit in France. I can speak freely of it all, for I am a declared friend of France, and people even feel some spite against me on that account. However, explain to your compatriots, that on the morrow of our conquest of Rome, in our frantic desire to resume our ancient rank, it was absolutely necessary that we should play our part in Europe and show that we were a power with whom the others must henceforth count. And hesitation was not allowable, all our interests impelled us toward Germany, the evidence was so binding as to impose itself. The stern law of the struggle for life weighs as heavily on nations as on individuals, and this it is which explains and justifies the rupture between the two sisters, France and Italy, the forgetting of so many ties, race, commercial intercourse, and, if you like, services also. The two sisters, ah! they now pursue each other with so much hatred that all common sense even seems at an end. My poor old heart bleeds when I read the articles which your newspapers and ours exchange like poisoned darts. When will this fratricidal massacre cease, which of the two will first realise the necessity of peace, the necessity of the alliance of the Latin races, if they are to remain alive amidst those torments of other races which more and more invade the

world?" Then gaily, with the *bonhomie* of a hero disarmed by old age, and seeking a refuge in his dreams, Orlando added: "Come, you must promise to help me as soon as you are in Paris. However small your field of action may be, promise me you will do all you can to promote peace between France and Italy; there can be no more holy task. Relate all you have seen here, all you have heard, oh! as frankly as possible. If we have faults, you certainly have faults as well. And, come, family quarrels can't last for ever!"

"No doubt," Pierre answered in some embarrassment. "Unfortunately they are the most tenacious. In families, when blood becomes exasperated with blood, hate goes as far as poison and the knife. And pardon becomes impossible."

He dared not fully express his thoughts. Since he had been in Rome, listening, and considering things, the quarrel between Italy and France had resumed itself in his mind in a fine tragic story. Once upon a time there were two princesses, daughters of a powerful queen, the mistress of the world. The elder one, who had inherited her mother's kingdom, was secretly grieved to see her sister, who had established herself in a neighbouring land, gradually increase in wealth, strength, and brilliancy, whilst she herself declined as if weakened by age, dismembered, so exhausted, and so sore, that she already felt defeated on the day when she attempted a supreme effort to regain universal power. And so how bitter were her feelings, how hurt she always felt on seeing her sister recover from the most frightful shocks,

resume her dazzling *gala*, and continue to reign over the world by dint of strength and grace and wit. Never would she forgive it, however well that envied and detested sister might act towards her. Therein lay an incurable wound, the life of one poisoned by that of the other, the hatred of old blood for young blood, which could only be quieted by death. And even if peace, as was possible, should soon be restored between them in presence of the younger sister's evident triumph, the other would always harbour deep within her heart an endless grief at being the elder yet the vassal.

"However, you may rely on me," Pierre affectionately resumed. "This quarrel between the two countries is certainly a great source of grief and a great peril. And assuredly I will only say what I think to be the truth about you. At the same time I fear that you hardly like the truth, for temperament and custom have hardly prepared you for it. The poets of every nation who at various times have written on Rome have intoxicated you with so much praise that you are scarcely fitted to hear the real truth about your Rome of to-day. No matter how superb a share of praise one may accord you, one must all the same look at the reality of things, and this reality is just what you won't admit, lovers of the beautiful as you ever are, susceptible too like women, whom the slightest hint of a wrinkle sends into despair."

Orlando began to laugh. "Well, certainly, one must always beautify things a little," said he. "Why speak of ugly faces at all? We in our

theatres only care for pretty music, pretty dancing, pretty pieces which please one. As for the rest, whatever is disagreeable let us hide it, for mercy's sake!"

"On the other hand," the priest continued, "I will cheerfully confess the great error of my book. The Italian Rome which I neglected and sacrificed to papal Rome not only exists but is already so powerful and triumphant that it is surely the other one which is bound to disappear in course of time. However much the Pope may strive to remain immutable within his Vatican, a steady evolution goes on around him, and the black world, by mingling with the white, has already become a grey world. I never realised that more acutely than at the *fête* given by Prince Buongiovanni for the betrothal of his daughter to your grand-nephew. I came away quite enchanted, won over to the cause of your resurrection."

The old man's eyes sparkled. "Ah! you were present?" said he, "and you witnessed a never-to-be-forgotten scene, did you not, and you no longer doubt our vitality, our growth into a great people when the difficulties of to-day are overcome? What does a quarter of a century, what does even a century matter! Italy will again rise to her old glory, as soon as the great people of to-morrow shall have sprung from the soil. And if I detest that man Sacco it is because to my mind he is the incarnation of all the enjoyers and intriguers whose appetite for the spoils of our conquest has retarded everything. But I live again in my dear grand-nephew Attilio, who represents the future, the generation of brave and

worthy men who will purify and educate the country. Ah! may some of the great ones of to-morrow spring from him and that adorable little Princess Celia, whom my niece Stefana, a sensible woman at bottom, brought to see me the other day. If you had seen that child fling her arms about me, call me endearing names, and tell me that I should be godfather to her first son, so that he might bear my name and once again save Italy! Yes, yes, may peace be concluded around that coming cradle; may the union of those dear children be the indissoluble marriage of Rome and the whole nation, and may all be repaired, and all blossom anew in their love!"

Tears came to his eyes, and Pierre, touched by his inextinguishable patriotism, sought to please him. "I myself," said he, "expressed to your son much the same wish on the evening of the betrothal *fête*, when I told him I trusted that their nuptials might be definitive and fruitful, and that from them and all the others there might arise the great nation which, now that I begin to know you, I hope you will soon become!"

"You said that!" exclaimed Orlando. "Well, I forgive your book, for you have understood at last; and new Rome, there she is, the Rome which is ours, which we wish to make worthy of her glorious past, and for the third time the queen of the world."

With one of those broad gestures into which he put all his remaining life, he pointed to the curtainless window where Rome spread out in solemn majesty from one horizon to the other. But, suddenly he turned his head and in a fit of paternal indignation

began to apostrophise young Angiolo Mascara. "You young rascal!" said he, "it's our Rome which you dream of destroying with your bombs, which you talk of razing like a rotten, tottering house, so as to rid the world of it for ever!"

Angiolo had hitherto remained silent, passionately listening to the others. His pretty, girlish, beardless face reflected the slightest emotion in sudden flashes; and his big blue eyes also had glowed on hearing what had been said of the people, the new people which it was necessary to create. "Yes!" he slowly replied in his pure and musical voice, "we mean to raze it and not leave a stone of it, but raze it in order to build it up again."

Orlando interrupted him with a soft, bantering laugh: "Oh! you would build it up again; that's fortunate!" he said.

"I would build it up again," the young man replied, in the trembling voice of an inspired prophet. "I would build it up again oh, so vast, so beautiful, and so noble! Will not the universal democracy of tomorrow, humanity when it is at last freed, need an unique city, which shall be the ark of alliance, the very centre of the world? And is not Rome designated, Rome which the prophecies have marked as eternal and immortal, where the destinies of the nations are to be accomplished? But in order that it may become the final definitive sanctuary, the capital of the destroyed kingdoms, where the wise men of all countries shall meet once every year, one must first of all purify it by fire, leave nothing of its old stains remaining. Then, when the sun shall

have absorbed all the pestilence of the old soil, we will rebuild the city ten times more beautiful and ten times larger than it has ever been. And what a city of truth and justice it will at last be, the Rome that has been announced and awaited for three thousand years, all in gold and all in marble, filling the Campagna from the sea to the Sabine and the Alban mountains, and so prosperous and so sensible that its twenty millions of inhabitants after regulating the law of labour will live with the unique joy of being. Yes, yes, Rome the Mother, Rome the Queen, alone on the face of the earth and for all eternity!"

Pierre listened to him, aghast. What! did the blood of Augustus go to such a point as this? The popes had not become masters of Rome without feeling impelled to rebuild it in their passion to rule over the world; young Italy, likewise yielding to the hereditary madness of universal domination, had in its turn sought to make the city larger than any other, erecting whole districts for people who had never come, and now even the Anarchists were possessed by the same stubborn dream of the race, a dream beyond all measure this time, a fourth and monstrous Rome, whose suburbs would invade continents in order that liberated humanity, united in one family, might find sufficient lodging! This was the climax. Never could more extravagant proof be given of the blood of pride and sovereignty which had scorched the veins of that race ever since Augustus had bequeathed it the inheritance of his absolute empire, with the furious instinct that the world legally belonged to it, and that its mission was to conquer

it again. This idea had intoxicated all the children of that historic soil, impelling all of them to make their city The City, the one which had reigned and which would reign again in splendour when the days predicted by the oracles should arrive. And Pierre remembered the four fatidical letters, the S.P.Q.R. of old and glorious Rome, which like an order of final triumph given to Destiny he had everywhere found in present-day Rome, on all the walls, on all the insignia, even on the municipal dust-carts! And he understood the prodigious vanity of these people, haunted by the glory of their ancestors, spellbound by the past of their city, declaring that she contains everything, that they themselves cannot know her thoroughly, that she is the sphinx who will some day explain the riddle of the universe, that she is so great and noble that all within her acquires increase of greatness and nobility, in such wise that they demand for her the idolatrous respect of the entire world, so vivacious in their minds is the illusive legend which clings to her, so incapable are they of realising that what was once great may be so no longer.

"But I know your fourth Rome," resumed Orlando, again enlivened. "It's the Rome of the people, the capital of the Universal Republic, which Mazzini dreamt of. Only he left the pope in it. Do you know, my lad, that if we old Republicans rallied to the monarchy, it was because we feared that in the event of revolution the country might fall into the hands of dangerous madmen such as those who have upset your brain? Yes, that was why we resigned ourselves to our monarchy, which is not much differ-

ent from a parliamentary republic. And now, good-bye and be sensible, remember that your poor mother would die of it if any misfortune should befall you. Come, let me embrace you all the same."

On receiving the hero's affectionate kiss Angiolo coloured like a girl. Then he went off with his gentle, dreamy air, never adding a word but politely inclining his head to the priest. Silence continued till Orlando's eyes encountered the newspapers scattered on the table, when he once more spoke of the terrible bereavement of the Boccaneras. He had loved Benedetta like a dear daughter during the sad days when she had dwelt near him; and finding the newspaper accounts of her death somewhat singular, worried in fact by the obscure points which he could divine in the tragedy, he was asking Pierre for particulars, when his son Luigi suddenly entered the room, breathless from having climbed the stairs so quickly and with his face full of anxious fear. He had just dismissed his contractors with impatient roughness, giving no thought to his serious financial position, the jeopardy in which his fortune was now placed, so anxious was he to be up above beside his father. And when he was there his first uneasy glance was for the old man, to make sure whether the priest by some imprudent word had not dealt him his death blow.

He shuddered on noticing how Orlando quivered, moved to tears by the terrible affair of which he was speaking; and for a moment he thought he had arrived too late, that the harm was done. "Good heavens, father!" he exclaimed, "what is the matter with

you, why are you crying?" And as he spoke he knelt at the old man's feet, taking hold of his hands and giving him such a passionate, loving glance that he seemed to be offering all the blood of his heart to spare him the slightest grief.

"It is about the death of that poor woman," Orlando sadly answered. "I was telling Monsieur Froment how it grieved me, and I added that I could not yet understand it all. The papers talk of a sudden death which is always so extraordinary."

The young Count rose again looking very pale. The priest had not yet spoken. But what a frightful moment was this! What if he should reply, what if he should speak out?

"You were present, were you not?" continued the old man addressing Pierre. "You saw everything. Tell me then how the thing happened."

Luigi Prada looked at Pierre. Their eyes met fixedly, plunging into one another's souls. All began afresh in their minds, Destiny on the march, Santobono encountered with his little basket, the drive across the melancholy Campagna, the conversation about poison while the little basket was gently rocked on the priest's knees; then, in particular, the sleepy *osteria*, and the little black hen, so suddenly killed, lying on the ground with a tiny streamlet of violet blood trickling from her beak. And next there was that splendid ball at the Buongiovanni mansion, with all its *odore di femina* and its triumph of love: and finally, before the Palazzo Boccanera, so black under the silvery moon, there was the man who lighted a cigar and went off without once turning

his head, allowing dim Destiny to accomplish its work of death. Both of them, Pierre and Prada, knew that story and lived it over again, having no need to recall it aloud in order to make certain that they had fully penetrated one another's soul.

Pierre did not immediately answer the old man. "Oh!" he murmured at last, "there were frightful things, yes, frightful things."

"No doubt—that is what I suspected," resumed Orlando. "You can tell us all. In presence of death my son has freely forgiven."

The young Count's gaze again sought that of Pierre with such weight, such ardent entreaty that the priest felt deeply stirred. He had just remembered that man's anguish during the ball, the atrocious torture of jealousy which he had undergone before allowing Destiny to avenge him. And he pictured also what must have been his feelings after the terrible outcome of it all: at first stupefaction at Destiny's harshness, at this full vengeance which he had never desired so ferocious; then icy calmness like that of the cool gambler who awaits events, reading the newspapers, and feeling no other remorse than that of the general whose victory has cost him too many men. He must have immediately realised that the Cardinal would stifle the affair for the sake of the Church's honour; and only retained one weight on his heart, regret possibly for that woman whom he had never won, with perhaps a last horrible jealousy which he did not confess to himself but from which he would always suffer, jealousy at knowing that she lay in another's arms in the grave, for all eternity.

But behold, after that victorious effort to remain calm, after that cold and remorseless waiting, Punishment arose, the fear that Destiny, travelling on with its poisoned figs, might have not yet ceased its march, and might by a rebound strike down his own father. Yet another thunderbolt, yet another victim, the most unexpected, the being he most adored! At that thought all his strength of resistance had in one moment collapsed, and he was there, in terror of Destiny, more at a loss, more trembling than a child.

"The newspapers, however," slowly said Pierre as if he were seeking his words, "the newspapers must have told you that the Prince succumbed first, and that the Contessina died of grief whilst embracing him for the last time. . . . As for the cause of death, *mon Dieu*, you know that doctors themselves in sudden cases scarcely dare to pronounce an exact opinion —"

He stopped short, for within him he had suddenly heard the voice of Benedetta giving him just before she died that terrible order: "You, who will see his father, I charge you to tell him that I cursed his son. I wish that he should know, it is necessary that he should know, for the sake of truth and justice." And was he, oh! Lord, about to obey that order, was it one of those divine commands which must be executed even if the result be a torrent of blood and tears? For a few seconds Pierre suffered from a heart-rending combat within him, hesitating between the act of truth and justice which the dead woman had called for and his own personal desire for forgiveness, and the horror he would feel should he kill that poor old man

by fulfilling his implacable mission which could benefit nobody. And certainly the other one, the son, must have understood what a supreme struggle was going on in the priest's mind, a struggle which would decide his own father's fate, for his glance became yet more suppliant than ever.

"One first thought that it was merely indigestion," continued Pierre, "but the Prince became so much worse, that one was alarmed, and the doctor was sent for —"

Ah! Prada's eyes, they had become so despairing, so full of the most touching and weightiest things, that the priest could read in them all the decisive reasons which were about to stay his tongue. No, no, he would not strike an innocent old man, he had promised nothing, and to obey the last expression of the dead woman's hatred would have seemed to him like charging her memory with a crime. The young Count, too, during those few minutes of anguish, had suffered a whole life of such abominable torture, that after all some little justice was done.

"And then," Pierre concluded, "when the doctor arrived he at once recognised that it was a case of infectious fever. There can be no doubt of it. This morning I attended the funeral, it was very splendid and very touching."

Orlando did not insist, but contented himself with saying that he also had felt much emotion all the morning on thinking of that funeral. Then, as he turned to set the papers on the table in order with his trembling hands, his son, icy cold with perspiration, staggering and clinging to the back of a chair in

order that he might not fall, again gave Pierre a long glance, but a very soft one, full of distracted gratitude.

"I am leaving this evening," resumed Pierre, who felt exhausted and wished to break off the conversation, "and I must now bid you farewell. Have you any commission to give me for Paris?"

"No, none," replied Orlando; and then, with sudden recollection, he added, "Yes, I have, though! You remember that book written by my old comrade in arms, Théophile Morin, one of Garibaldi's Thousand, that manual for the bachelor's degree which he desired to see translated and adopted here. Well, I am pleased to say that I have a promise that it shall be used in our schools, but on condition that he makes some alterations in it. Luigi, give me the book, it is there on that shelf."

Then, when his son had handed him the volume, he showed Pierre some notes which he had pencilled on the margins, and explained to him the modifications which were desired in the general scheme of the work. "Will you be kind enough," he continued, "to take this copy to Morin himself? His address is written inside the cover. If you can do so you will spare me the trouble of writing him a very long letter; in ten minutes you can explain matters to him more clearly and completely than I could do in ten pages. . . . And you must embrace Morin for me, and tell him that I still love him, oh! with all my heart of the bygone days, when I could still use my legs and we two fought like devils side by side under a hail of bullets."

A short silence followed, that pause, that embarrass-

ment tinged with emotion which precedes the moment of farewell. "Come, good-bye," said Orlando, "embrace me for him and for yourself, embrace me affectionately like that lad did just now. I am so old and so near my end, my dear Monsieur Froment, that you will allow me to call you my child and to kiss you like a grandfather, wishing you all courage and peace, and that faith in life which alone helps one to live."

Pierre was so touched that tears rose to his eyes, and when with all his soul he kissed the stricken hero on either cheek, he felt that he likewise was weeping. With a hand yet as vigorous as a vice, Orlando detained him for a moment beside his arm-chair, whilst with his other hand waving in a supreme gesture, he for the last time showed him Rome, so immense and mournful under the ashen sky. And his voice came low, quivering and suppliant. "For mercy's sake swear to me that you will love her all the same, in spite of all, for she is the cradle, the mother! Love her for all that she no longer is, love her for all that she desires to be! Do not say that her end has come, love her, love her so that she may live again, that she may live for ever!"

Pierre again embraced him, unable to find any other response, upset as he was by all the passion displayed by that old warrior, who spoke of his city as a man of thirty might speak of the woman he adores. And he found him so handsome and so lofty with his old blanchéd, leonine mane and his stubborn belief in approaching resurrection, that once more the other old Roman, Cardinal Boccanera, arose before

him, equally stubborn in his faith and relinquishing nought of his dream, even though he might be crushed on the spot by the fall of the heavens. These twain ever stood face to face, at either end of their city, alone rearing their lofty figures above the horizon, whilst awaiting the future.

Then, when Pierre had bowed to Count Luigi, and found himself outside again in the Via Venti Settembre he was all eagerness to get back to the Bocca-nera mansion so as to pack up his things and depart. His farewell visits were made, and he now only had to take leave of Donna Serafina and the Cardinal, and to thank them for all their kind hospitality. For him alone did their doors open, for they had shut themselves up on returning from the funeral, resolved to see nobody. At twilight, therefore, Pierre had no one but Victorine to keep him company in the vast, black mansion, for when he expressed a desire to take supper with Don Vigilio she told him that the latter had also shut himself in his room. Desirous as he was of at least shaking hands with the secretary for the last time, Pierre went to knock at the door, which was so near his own, but could obtain no reply, and divined that the poor fellow, overcome by a fresh attack of fever and suspicion, desired not to see him again, in terror at the idea that he might compromise himself yet more than he had done already. Thereupon, it was settled that as the train only started at seventeen minutes past ten Victorine should serve Pierre his supper on the little table in his sitting-room at eight o'clock. She brought him a lamp and spoke of putting his linen in order, but he absolutely

declined her help, and she had to leave him to pack up quietly by himself.

He had purchased a little box, since his valise could not possibly hold all the linen and winter clothing which had been sent to him from Paris as his stay in Rome became more and more protracted. However, the packing was soon accomplished; the wardrobe was emptied, the drawers were visited, the box and valise filled and securely locked by seven o'clock. An hour remained to him before supper and he sat there resting, when his eyes whilst travelling round the walls to make sure that he had forgotten nothing, encountered that old painting by some unknown master, which had so often filled him with emotion. The lamplight now shone full upon it; and this time again as he gazed at it he felt a blow in the heart, a blow which was all the deeper, as now, at his parting hour, he found a symbol of his defeat at Rome in that dolent, tragic, half-naked woman, draped in a shred of linen, and weeping between her clasped hands whilst seated on the threshold of the palace whence she had been driven. Did not that rejected one, that stubborn victim of love, who sobbed so bitterly, and of whom one knew nothing, neither what her face was like, nor whence she had come, nor what her fault had been — did she not personify all man's useless efforts to force the doors of truth, and all the frightful abandonment into which he falls as soon as he collides with the wall which shuts the unknown off from him? For a long while did Pierre look at her, again worried at being obliged to depart without having seen her face behind her streaming

golden hair, that face of dolorous beauty which he pictured radiant with youth and delicious in its mystery. And as he gazed he was just fancying that he could see it, that it was becoming his at last, when there was a knock at the door and Narcisse Habert entered.

Pierre was surprised to see the young *attaché*, for three days previously he had started for Florence, impelled thither by one of the sudden whims of his artistic fancy. However, he at once apologised for his unceremonious intrusion. "Ah! there is your luggage!" he said; "I heard that you were going away this evening, and I was unwilling to let you leave Rome without coming to shake hands with you. But what frightful things have happened since we met! I only returned this afternoon, so that I could not attend the funeral. However, you may well imagine how thunderstruck I was by the news of those frightful deaths."

Then, suspecting some unacknowledged tragedy, like a man well acquainted with the legendary dark side of Rome, he put some questions to Pierre but did not insist on them, being at bottom far too prudent to burden himself uselessly with redoubtable secrets. And after Pierre had given him such particulars as he thought fit, the conversation changed and they spoke at length of Italy, Rome, Naples, and Florence. "Ah! Florence, Florence!" Narcisse repeated languorously. He had lighted a cigarette and his words fell more slowly, as he glanced round the room. "You were very well lodged here," he said, "it is very quiet. I had never come up to this floor before."

His eyes continued wandering over the walls until they were at last arrested by the old painting which the lamp illumined, and thereupon he remained for a moment blinking as if surprised. And all at once he rose and approached the picture. "Dear me, dear me," said he, "but that's very good, that's very fine."

"Isn't it?" rejoined Pierre. "I know nothing about painting but I was stirred by that picture on the very day of my arrival, and over and over again it has kept me here with my heart beating and full of indescribable feelings."

Narcisse no longer spoke but examined the painting with the care of a connoisseur, an expert, whose keen glance decides the question of authenticity, and appraises commercial value. And the most extraordinary delight appeared upon the young man's fair, rapturous face, whilst his fingers began to quiver. "But it's a Botticelli, it's a Botticelli! There can be no doubt about it," he exclaimed. "Just look at the hands, and look at the folds of the drapery! And the colour of the hair, and the technique, the flow of the whole composition. A Botticelli, ah! *mon Dieu*, a Botticelli."

He became quite faint, overflowing with increasing admiration as he penetrated more and more deeply into the subject, at once so simple and so poignant. Was it not acutely modern? The artist had foreseen our pain-fraught century, our anxiety in presence of the invisible, our distress at being unable to cross the portal of mystery which was for ever closed. And what an eternal symbol of the world's wretchedness was that woman, whose face one could not see, and

who sobbed so distractedly without it being possible for one to wipe away her tears. Yes, a Botticelli, unknown, uncatalogued, what a discovery! Then he paused to inquire of Pierre: "Did you know it was a Botticelli?"

"Oh no! I spoke to Don Vigilio about it one day, but he seemed to think it of no account. And Victorine, when I spoke to her, replied that all those old things only served to harbour dust."

Narcisse protested, quite stupefied: "What! they have a Botticelli here and don't know it! Ah! how well I recognise in that the Roman princes who, unless their masterpieces have been labelled, are for the most part utterly at sea among them! No doubt this one has suffered a little, but a simple cleaning would make a marvel, a famous picture of it, for which a museum would at least give—"

He abruptly stopped, completing his sentence with a wave of the hand and not mentioning the figure which was on his lips. And then, as Victorine came in followed by Giacomo to lay the little table for Pierre's supper, he turned his back upon the Botticelli and said no more about it. The young priest's attention was aroused, however, and he could well divine what was passing in the other's mind. Under that make-believe Florentine, all angelicalness, there was an experienced business man, who well knew how to look after his pecuniary interests and was even reported to be somewhat avaricious. Pierre, who was aware of it, could not help smiling therefore when he saw him take his stand before another picture—a frightful Virgin, badly copied from some eighteenth-

century canvas — and exclaim: “Dear me! that’s not at all bad! I’ve a friend, I remember, who asked me to buy him some old paintings. I say, Victorine, now that Donna Serafina and the Cardinal are left alone do you think they would like to rid themselves of a few valueless pictures?”

The servant raised her arms as if to say that if it depended on her, everything might be carried away. Then she replied: “Not to a dealer, sir, on account of the nasty rumours which would at once spread about, but I’m sure they would be happy to please a friend. The house costs a lot to keep up, and money would be welcome.”

Pierre then vainly endeavoured to persuade Narcisse to stay and sup with him, but the young man gave his word of honour that he was expected elsewhere and was even late. And thereupon he ran off, after pressing the priest’s hands and affectionately wishing him a good journey.

Eight o’clock was striking, and Pierre seated himself at the little table, Victorine remaining to serve him after dismissing Giacomo, who had brought the supper things upstairs in a basket. “The people here make me wild,” said the worthy woman after the other had gone, “they are so slow. And besides, it’s a pleasure for me to serve you your last meal, Monsieur l’Abbé. I’ve had a little French dinner cooked for you, a *sole au gratin* and a roast fowl.”

Pierre was touched by this attention, and pleased to have the company of a compatriot whilst he partook of his final meal amidst the deep silence of the old, black, deserted mansion. The buxom figure of Victo-

rine was still instinct with mourning, with grief for the loss of her dear Contessina, but her daily toil was already setting her erect again, restoring her quick activity; and she spoke almost cheerfully whilst passing plates and dishes to Pierre. "And to think Monsieur l'Abbé," said she, "that you'll be in Paris on the morning of the day after to-morrow! As for me, you know, it seems as if I only left Auneau yesterday. Ah! what fine soil there is there; rich soil yellow like gold, not like their poor stuff here which smells of sulphur! And the pretty fresh willows beside our stream, too, and the little wood so full of moss! They've no moss here, their trees look like tin under that stupid sun of theirs which burns up the grass. *Mon Dieu!* in the early times I would have given I don't know what for a good fall of rain to soak me and wash away all the dust. Ah! I shall never get used to their awful Rome. What a country and what people!"

Pierre was quite enlivened by her stubborn fidelity to her own nook, which after five and twenty years of absence still left her horrified with that city of crude light and black vegetation, true daughter as she was of a smiling and temperate clime which of a morning was steeped in rosy mist. "But now that your young mistress is dead," said he, "what keeps you here? Why don't you take the train with me?"

She looked at him in surprise: "Go off with you, go back to Auneau! Oh! it's impossible, Monsieur l'Abbé. It would be too ungrateful to begin with, for Donna Serafina is accustomed to me, and it would be bad on my part to forsake her and his Eminence now

that they are in trouble. And besides, what could I do elsewhere? No, my little hole is here now."

"So you will never see Auneau again?"

"No, never, that's certain."

"And you don't mind being buried here, in their ground which smells of sulphur?"

She burst into a frank laugh. "Oh!" she said, "I don't mind where I am when I'm dead. One sleeps well everywhere. And it's funny that you should be so anxious as to what there may be when one's dead. There's nothing, I'm sure. That's what tranquillises me, to feel that it will be all over and that I shall have a rest. The good God owes us that after we've worked so hard. You know that I'm not devout, oh! dear no. Still that doesn't prevent me from behaving properly, and, true as I stand here, I've never had a lover. It seems foolish to say such a thing at my age, still I say it because it's the sober truth."

She continued laughing like the worthy woman she was, having no belief in priests and yet without a sin upon her conscience. And Pierre once more marvelled at the simple courage and great practical common sense of this laborious and devoted creature, who for him personified the whole unbelieving lowly class of France, those who no longer believe and will believe never more. Ah! to be as she was, to do one's work and lie down for the eternal sleep without any revolt of pride, satisfied with the one joy of having accomplished one's share of toil!

When Pierre had finished his supper Victorine summoned Giacomo to clear the things away. And as it was only half-past eight she advised the priest

to spend another quiet hour in his room. Why go and catch a chill by waiting at the station? She could send for a cab at half-past nine, and as soon as it arrived she would send word to him and have his luggage carried down. He might be easy as to that, and need trouble himself about nothing.

When she had gone off Pierre soon sank into a deep reverie. It seemed to him, indeed, as if he had already quitted Rome, as if the city were far away and he could look back on it, and his experiences within it. His book, "New Rome," arose in his mind; and he remembered his first morning on the Janiculum, his view of Rome from the terrace of San Pietro in Montorio, a Rome such as he had dreamt of, so young and ethereal under the pure sky. It was then that he had asked himself the decisive question: Could Catholicism be renewed? Could it revert to the spirit of primitive Christianity, become the religion of the democracy, the faith which the distracted modern world, in danger of death, awaits in order that it may be pacified and live? His heart had then beaten with hope and enthusiasm. After his disaster at Lourdes from which he had scarcely recovered, he had come to attempt another and supreme experiment by asking Rome what her reply to his question would be. And now the experiment had failed, he knew what answer Rome had returned him through her ruins, her monuments, her very soil, her people, her prelates, her cardinals, her pope! No, Catholicism could not be renewed: no, it could not revert to the spirit of primitive Christianity; no, it could not become the religion of the democracy, the new faith which might save the old toppling socie-

ties in danger of death. Though it seemed to be of democratic origin, it was henceforth riveted to that Roman soil, it remained kingly in spite of everything, forced to cling to the principle of temporal power under penalty of suicide, bound by tradition, enchained by dogma, its evolutions mere simulations whilst in reality it was reduced to such immobility that, behind the bronze doors of the Vatican, the papacy was the prisoner, the ghost of eighteen centuries of atavism, indulging the ceaseless dream of universal dominion. There, where with priestly faith exalted by love of the suffering and the poor, he had come to seek life and a resurrection of the Christian communion, he had found death, the dust of a destroyed world in which nothing more could germinate, an exhausted soil whence now there could never grow aught but that despotic papacy, the master of bodies as it was of souls. To his distracted cry asking for a new religion, Rome had been content to reply by condemning his book as a work tainted with heresy, and he himself had withdrawn it amidst the bitter grief of his disillusion. He had seen, he had understood, and all had collapsed. And it was himself, his soul and his brain, which lay among the ruins.

Pierre was stifling. He rose, threw the window overlooking the Tiber wide open, and leant out. The rain had begun to fall again at the approach of evening, but now it had once more ceased. The atmosphere was very mild, moist, even oppressive. The moon must have arisen in the ashen grey sky, for her presence could be divined behind the clouds which she illumined with a vague, yellow, mournful light. And

under that slumberous glimmer the vast horizon showed blackly and phantom-like: the Janiculum in front with the close-packed houses of the Trastevere; the river flowing away yonder on the left towards the dim height of the Palatine; whilst on the right the dome of St. Peter's showed forth, round and domineering in the pale atmosphere. Pierre could not see the Quirinal but divined it to be behind him, and could picture its long façade shutting off part of the sky. And what a collapsing Rome, half-devoured by the gloom, was this, so different from the Rome all youth and dreamland which he had beheld and passionately loved on the day of his arrival! He remembered the three symbolic summits which had then summed up for him the whole long history of Rome, the ancient, the papal, and the Italian city. But if the Palatine had remained the same discrowned mount on which there only rose the phantom of the ancestor, Augustus, emperor and pontiff, master of the world, he now pictured St. Peter's and the Quirinal as strangely altered. To that royal palace which he had so neglected, and which had seemed to him like a flat, low barrack, to that new Government which had brought him the impression of some attempt at sacrilegious modernity, he now accorded the large, increasing space that they occupied in the panorama, the whole of which they would apparently soon fill; whilst, on the contrary, St. Peter's, that dome which he had found so triumphal, all azure, reigning over the city like a gigantic and unshakable monarch, at present seemed to him full of cracks and already shrinking, as if it were one of those huge old piles, which, through the secret, unsus-

pected decay of their timbers, at times fall to the ground in one mass.

A murmur, a growling plaint rose from the swollen Tiber, and Pierre shivered at the icy abysmal breath which swept past his face. And his thoughts of the three summits and their symbolic triangle aroused within him the memory of the sufferings of the great silent multitude of poor and lowly for whom pope and king had so long disputed. It all dated from long ago, from the day when, in dividing the inheritance of Augustus, the emperor had been obliged to content himself with men's bodies, leaving their souls to the pope, whose one idea had henceforth been to gain the temporal power of which God, in his person, was despoiled. All the middle ages had been disturbed and ensanguined by the quarrel, till at last the silent multitude weary of vexations and misery spoke out; threw off the papal yoke at the Reformation, and later on began to overthrow its kings. And then, as Pierre had written in his book, a new fortune had been offered to the pope, that of reverting to the ancient dream, by dissociating himself from the fallen thrones and placing himself on the side of the wretched in the hope that this time he would conquer the people, win it entirely for himself. Was it not prodigious to see that man, Leo XIII, despoiled of his kingdom and allowing himself to be called a socialist, assembling under his banner the great flock of the disinherited, and marching against the kings at the head of that fourth estate to whom the coming century will belong? The eternal struggle for possession of the people continued as bitterly as ever even in

Rome itself, where pope and king, who could see each other from their windows, contended together like falcon and hawk for the little birds of the woods. And in this for Pierre lay the reason why Catholicism was fatally condemned; for it was of monarchical essence to such a point that the Apostolic and Roman papacy could not renounce the temporal power under penalty of becoming something else and disappearing. In vain did it feign a return to the people, in vain did it seek to appear all soul; there was no room in the midst of the world's democracies for any such total and universal sovereignty as that which it claimed to hold from God. Pierre ever beheld the Imperator sprouting up afresh in the Pontifex Maximus, and it was this in particular which had killed his dream, destroyed his book, heaped up all those ruins before which he remained distracted without either strength or courage.

The sight of that ashen Rome, whose edifices faded away into the night, at last brought him such a heart-pang that he came back into the room and fell on a chair near his luggage. Never before had he experienced such distress of spirit, it seemed like the death of his soul. After his disaster at Lourdes he had not come to Rome in search of the candid and complete faith of a little child, but the superior faith of an intellectual being, rising above rites and symbols, and seeking to ensure the greatest possible happiness of mankind based on its need of certainty. And if this collapsed, if Catholicism could not be rejuvenated and become the religion and moral law of the new generations, if the Pope at Rome and with

Rome could not be the Father, the arch of alliance, the spiritual leader whom all hearkened to and obeyed, why then, in Pierre's eyes, the last hope was wrecked, the supreme rending which must plunge present-day society into the abyss was near at hand. That scaffolding of Catholic socialism which had seemed to him so happily devised for the consolidation of the old Church, now appeared to him lying on the ground; and he judged it severely as a mere passing expedient which might perhaps for some years prop up the ruined edifice, but which was simply based on an intentional misunderstanding, on a skilful lie, on politics and diplomacy. No, no, that the people should once again, as so many times before, be duped and gained over, caressed in order that it might be enthralled — this was repugnant to one's reason, and the whole system appeared degenerate, dangerous, temporary, calculated to end in the worst catastrophes. So this then was the finish, nothing remained erect and stable, the old world was about to disappear amidst the frightful sanguinary crisis whose approach was announced by such indisputable signs. And he, before that chaos near at hand, had no soul left him, having once more lost his faith in that decisive experiment which, he had felt beforehand, would either strengthen him or strike him down for ever. The thunderbolt had fallen, and now, O God, what should he do?

To shake off his anguish he began to walk across the room. Aye, what should he do now that he was all doubt again, all dolorous negation, and that his cassock weighed more heavily than it had ever weighed upon his shoulders? He remembered hav-

ing told Monsignor Nani that he would never submit, would never be able to resign himself and kill his hope in salvation by love, but would rather reply by a fresh book, in which he would say in what new soil the new religion would spring up. Yes, a flaming book against Rome, in which he would set down all he had seen, a book which would depict the real Rome, the Rome which knows neither charity nor love, and is dying in the pride of its purple! He had spoken of returning to Paris, leaving the Church and going to the point of schism. Well, his luggage now lay there packed, he was going off and he would write that book, he would be the great schismatic who was awaited! Did not everything foretell approaching schism amidst that great movement of men's minds, weary of old mummified dogmas and yet hungering for the divine? Even Leo XIII must be conscious of it, for his whole policy, his whole effort towards Christian unity, his assumed affection for the democracy had no other object than that of grouping the whole family around the papacy, and consolidating it so as to render the Pope invincible in the approaching struggle. But the times had come, Catholicism would soon find that it could grant no more political concessions without perishing, that at Rome it was reduced to the immobility of an ancient hieratic idol, and that only in the lands of propaganda, where it was fighting against other religions, could further evolution take place. It was, indeed, for this reason that Rome was condemned, the more so as the abolition of the temporal power, by accustoming men's minds to the idea of a purely spiritual

papacy, seemed likely to conduce to the rise of some anti-pope, far away, whilst the successor of St. Peter was compelled to cling stubbornly to his Apostolic and Roman fiction. A bishop, a priest would arise—where, who could tell? Perhaps yonder in that free America, where there are priests whom the struggle for life has turned into convinced socialists, into ardent democrats, who are ready to go forward with the coming century. And whilst Rome remains unable to relinquish aught of her past, aught of her mysteries and dogmas, that priest will relinquish all of those things which fall from one in dust. Ah! to be that priest, to be that great reformer, that saviour of modern society, what a vast dream, what a part, akin to that of a Messiah summoned by the nations in distress. For a moment Pierre was transported as by a breeze of hope and triumph. If that great change did not come in France, in Paris, it would come elsewhere, yonder across the ocean, or farther yet, wherever there might be a sufficiently fruitful soil for the new seed to spring from it in overflowing harvests. A new religion! a new religion! even as he had cried on returning from Lourdes, a religion which in particular should not be an appetite for death, a religion which should at last realise here below that Kingdom of God referred to in the Gospel, and which should equitably divide terrestrial wealth, and with the law of labour ensure the rule of truth and justice.

In the fever of this fresh dream Pierre already saw the pages of his new book flaring before him when his eyes fell on an object lying upon a chair, which at

first surprised him. This also was a book, that work of Théophile Morin's which Orlando had commissioned him to hand to its author, and he felt annoyed with himself at having left it there, for he might have forgotten it altogether. Before putting it into his valise he retained it for a moment in his hand turning its pages over, his ideas changing as by a sudden mental revolution. The work was, however, a very modest one, one of those manuals for the bachelor's degree containing little beyond the first elements of the sciences; still all the sciences were represented in it, and it gave a fair summary of the present state of human knowledge. And it was indeed Science which thus burst upon Pierre's reverie with the energy of sovereign power. Not only was Catholicism swept away from his mind, but all his religious conceptions, every hypothesis of the divine tottered and fell. Only that little school book, nothing but the universal desire for knowledge, that education which ever extends and penetrates the whole people, and behold the mysteries became absurdities, the dogmas crumbled, and nothing of ancient faith was left. A nation nourished upon Science, no longer believing in mysteries and dogmas, in a compensatory system of reward and punishment, is a nation whose faith is for ever dead: and without faith Catholicism cannot be. Therein is the blade of the knife, the knife which falls and severs. If one century, if two centuries be needed, Science will take them. She alone is eternal. It is pure *naïveté* to say that reason is not contrary to faith. The truth is, that now already in order to save mere fragments of the sacred writings, it has been necessary to accom-

modate them to the new certainties, by taking refuge in the assertion that they are simply symbolical! And what an extraordinary attitude is that of the Catholic Church, expressly forbidding all those who may discover a truth contrary to the sacred writings to pronounce upon it in definitive fashion, and ordering them to await events in the conviction that this truth will some day be proved an error! Only the Pope, says the Church, is infallible; Science is fallible, her constant groping is exploited against her, and divines remain on the watch striving to make it appear that her discoveries of to-day are in contradiction with her discoveries of yesterday. What do her sacrilegious assertions, what do her certainties rending dogma asunder, matter to a Catholic since it is certain that at the end of time, she, Science, will again join Faith, and become the latter's very humble slave! Voluntary blindness and impudent denial of things as evident as the sunlight, can no further go. But all the same the insignificant little book, the manual of truth travels on continuing its work, destroying error and building up the new world, even as the infinitesimal agents of life built up our present continents.

In the sudden great enlightenment which had come on him Pierre at last felt himself upon firm ground. Has Science ever retreated? It is Catholicism which has always retreated before her, and will always be forced to retreat. Never does Science stop, step by step she wrests truth from error, and to say that she is bankrupt because she cannot explain the world in one word and at one effort, is pure and simple nonsense. If she leaves, and no doubt will always leave

a smaller and smaller domain to mystery, and if supposition may always strive to explain that mystery, it is none the less certain that she ruins, and with each successive hour will add to the ruin of the ancient hypotheses, those which crumble away before the acquired truths. And Catholicism is in the position of those ancient hypotheses, and will be in it yet more thoroughly to-morrow. Like all religions it is, at the bottom, but an explanation of the world, a superior social and political code, intended to bring about the greatest possible sum of peace and happiness on earth. This code which embraces the universality of things thenceforth becomes human, and mortal like everything that is human. One cannot put it on one side and say that it exists on one side by itself, whilst Science does the same on the other. Science is total and has already shown Catholicism that such is the case, and will show it again and again by compelling it to repair the breaches incessantly effected in its ramparts till the day of victory shall come with the final assault of resplendent truth. Frankly, it makes one laugh to hear people assign a rôle to Science, forbid her to enter such and such a domain, predict to her that she shall go no further, and declare that at this end of the century she is already so weary that she abdicates! Oh! you little men of shallow or distorted brains, you politicians planning expedients, you dogmatics at bay, you authoritarians so obstinately clinging to the ancient dreams, Science will pass on, and sweep you all away like withered leaves!

Pierre continued glancing through the humble little book, listening to all it told him of sovereign Science.

She cannot become bankrupt, for she does not promise the absolute, she is simply the progressive conquest of truth. Never has she pretended that she could give the whole truth at one effort, that sort of edifice being precisely the work of metaphysics, of revelation, of faith. The rôle of Science, on the contrary, is only to destroy error as she gradually advances and increases enlightenment. And thus, far from becoming bankrupt, in her march which nothing stops, she remains the only possible truth for well-balanced and healthy minds. As for those whom she does not satisfy, who crave for immediate and universal knowledge, they have the resource of seeking refuge in no matter what religious hypothesis, provided, if they wish to appear in the right, that they build their fancy upon acquired certainties. Everything which is raised on proven error falls. However, although religious feeling persists among mankind, although the need of religion may be eternal, it by no means follows that Catholicism is eternal, for it is, after all, but one form of religion, which other forms preceded and which others will follow. Religions may disappear, but religious feeling will create new ones even with the help of Science. Pierre thought of that alleged repulse of Science by the present-day awakening of mysticism, the causes of which he had indicated in his book: the discredit into which the idea of liberty has fallen among the people, duped in the last social reorganisation, and the uneasiness of the *élite*, in despair at the void in which their liberated minds and enlarged intelligences have left them. It is the anguish of the

Unknown springing up again; but it is also only a natural and momentary reaction after so much labour, on finding that Science does not yet calm our thirst for justice, our desire for security, or our ancient idea of an eternal after-life of enjoyment. In order, however, that Catholicism might be born anew, as some seem to think it will be, the social soil would have to change, and it cannot change; it no longer possesses the sap needful for the renewal of a decaying formula which schools and laboratories destroy more and more each day. The ground is other than it once was, a different oak must spring from it. May Science therefore have her religion, for such a religion will soon be the only one possible for the coming democracies, for the nations, whose knowledge ever increases whilst their Catholic faith is already nought but dust.

And all at once, by way of conclusion, Pierre bethought himself of the idiocy of the Congregation of the Index. It had condemned his book, and would surely condemn the other one that he had thought of, should he ever write it. A fine piece of work truly! To fall tooth and nail on the poor books of an enthusiastic dreamer, in which chimera contended with chimera! Yet the Congregation was so foolish as not to interdict that little book which he held in his hands, that humble book which alone was to be feared, which was the ever triumphant enemy that would surely overthrow the Church. Modest it was in its cheap "get up" as a school manual, but that did not matter: danger began with the very alphabet, increased as knowledge was acquired, and burst forth

with those *résumés* of the physical, chemical, and natural sciences which bring the very Creation, as described by Holy Writ, into question. However, the Index dared not attempt to suppress those humble volumes, those terrible soldiers of truth, those destroyers of faith. What was the use, then, of all the money which Leo XIII drew from his hidden treasure of the Peter's Pence to subvention Catholic schools, with the thought of forming the believing generations which the papacy needed to enable it to conquer? What was the use of that precious money if it was only to serve for the purchase of similar insignificant yet formidable volumes, which could never be sufficiently "cooked" and expurgated, but would always contain too much Science, that growing Science which one day would blow up both Vatican and St. Peter's? Ah! that idiotic and impotent Index, what wretchedness and what derision!

Then, when Pierre had placed Théophile Morin's book in his valise, he once more returned to the window, and while leaning out, beheld an extraordinary vision. Under the cloudy, coppery sky, in the mild and mournful night, patches of wavy mist had risen, hiding many of the house-roofs with trailing shreds which looked like shrouds. Entire edifices had disappeared, and he imagined that the times were at last accomplished, and that truth had at last destroyed St. Peter's dome. In a hundred or a thousand years, it would be like that, fallen, obliterated from the black sky. One day, already, he had felt it tottering and cracking beneath him, and had foreseen that this temple of Catholicism would fall even

as Jove's temple had fallen on the Capitol. And it was over now, the dome had strewn the ground with fragments, and all that remained standing, in addition to a portion of the apse, where five columns of the central nave, still upholding a shred of entablature, and four cyclopean buttress-piers on which the dome had rested — piers which still arose, isolated and superb, looking indestructible among all the surrounding downfall. But a denser mist flowed past, another thousand years no doubt went by, and then nothing whatever remained. The apse, the last pillars, the giant piers themselves were felled! The wind had swept away their dust, and it would have been necessary to search the soil beneath the brambles and the nettles to find a few fragments of broken statues, marbles with mutilated inscriptions, on the sense of which learned men were unable to agree. And, as formerly, on the Capitol, among the buried remnants of Jupiter's temple, goats strayed and climbed through the solitude, browsing upon the bushes, amidst the deep silence of the oppressive summer sunlight, which only the buzzing flies disturbed.

Then, only then, did Pierre feel the supreme collapse within him. It was really all over, Science was victorious, nothing of the old world remained. What use would it be then to become the great schismatic, the reformer who was awaited? Would it not simply mean the building up of a new dream? Only the eternal struggle of Science against the Unknown, the searching, pursuing inquiry which incessantly moderated man's thirst for the divine, now seemed

to him of import, leaving him waiting to know if she would ever triumph so completely as to suffice mankind, by satisfying all its wants. And in the disaster which had overcome his apostolic enthusiasm, in presence of all those ruins, having lost his faith, and even his hope of utilising old Catholicism for social and moral salvation, there only remained reason that held him up. She had at one moment given way. If he had dreamt that book, and had just passed through that terrible crisis, it was because sentiment had once again overcome reason within him. It was his mother, so to say, who had wept in his heart, who had filled him with an irresistible desire to relieve the wretched and prevent the massacres which seemed near at hand; and his passion for charity had thus swept aside the scruples of his intelligence. But it was his father's voice that he now heard, lofty and bitter reason which, though it had fled, at present came back in all sovereignty. As he had done already after Lourdes, he protested against the glorification of the absurd and the downfall of common sense. Reason alone enabled him to walk erect and firm among the remnants of the old beliefs, even amidst the obscurities and failures of Science. Ah! Reason, it was through her alone that he suffered, through her alone that he could content himself, and he swore that he would now always seek to satisfy her, even if in doing so he should lose his happiness.

At that moment it would have been vain for him to ask what he ought to do. Everything remained in suspense, the world stretched before him still littered with the ruins of the past, of which, to-

morrow, it would perhaps be rid. Yonder, in that dolorous faubourg of Paris, he would find good Abbé Rose, who but a few days previously had written begging him to return and tend, love, and save his poor, since Rome, so dazzling from afar, was dead to charity. And around the good and peaceful old priest he would find the ever growing flock of wretched ones; the little fledglings who had fallen from their nests, and whom he found pale with hunger and shivering with cold; the households of abominable misery in which the father drank and the mother became a prostitute, while the sons and the daughters sank into vice and crime; the dwellings, too, through which famine swept, where all was filth and shameful promiscuity, where there was neither furniture nor linen, nothing but purely animal life. And then there would also come the cold blasts of winter, the disasters of slack times, the hurricanes of consumption carrying off the weak, whilst the strong clenched their fists and dreamt of vengeance. One evening, too, perhaps, he might again enter some room of horror and find that another mother had killed herself and her five little ones, her last-born in her arms clinging to her drained breast, and the others scattered over the bare tiles, at last contented, feeling hunger no more, now that they were dead! But no, no, such awful things were no longer possible: such black misery conducting to suicide in the heart of that great city of Paris, which is brimful of wealth, intoxicated with enjoyment, and flings millions out of window for mere pleasure! The very foundations of the social edifice were rotten; all would soon col-

lapse amidst mire and blood. Never before had Pierre so acutely realised the derisive futility of Charity. And all at once he became conscious that the long-awaited word, the word which was at last springing from the great silent multitude, the crushed and gagged people was *Justice!* Aye, Justice not Charity! Charity had only served to perpetuate misery, Justice perhaps would cure it. It was for Justice that the wretched hungered; an act of Justice alone could sweep away the olden world so that the new one might be reared. After all, the great silent multitude would belong neither to Vatican nor to Quirinal, neither to pope nor to king. If it had covertly growled through the ages in its long, sometimes mysterious, and sometimes open contest; if it had struggled betwixt pontiff and emperor who each had wished to retain it for himself alone, it had only done so in order that it might free itself, proclaim its resolve to belong to none on the day when it should cry Justice! Would to-morrow then at last prove that day of Justice and Truth? For his part, Pierre amidst his anguish — having on one hand that need of the divine which tortures man, and on the other sovereignty of reason which enables man to remain erect — was only sure of one thing, that he would keep his vows, continue a priest, watching over the belief of others though he could not himself believe, and would thus chastely and honestly follow his profession, amidst haughty sadness at having been unable to renounce his intelligence in the same way as he had renounced his flesh and his dream of saving the nations. And again, as after Lourdes, he would wait.

So deeply was he plunged in reflection at that window, face to face with the mist which seemed to be destroying the dark edifices of Rome, that he did not hear himself called. At last, however, he felt a tap on the shoulder: "Monsieur l'Abbé!" And then as he turned he saw Victorine, who said to him: "It is half-past nine; the cab is there. Giacomo has already taken your luggage down. You must come away, Monsieur l'Abbé."

Then seeing him blink, still dazed as it were, she smiled and added: "You were bidding Rome good-bye. What a frightful sky there is."

"Yes, frightful," was his reply.

Then they descended the stairs. He had handed her a hundred-franc note to be shared between herself and the other servants. And she apologised for going down before him with the lamp, explaining that the old palace was so dark that evening one could scarcely see.

Ah! that departure, that last descent through the black and empty mansion, it quite upset Pierre's heart. He gave his room that glance of farewell which always saddened him, even when he was leaving a spot where he had suffered. Then, on passing Don Vigilio's chamber, whence there only came a quivering silence, he pictured the secretary with his head buried in his pillows, holding his breath for fear lest he should speak and attract vengeance. But it was in particular on the second and first floor landings, on passing the closed doors of Donna Serafina and the Cardinal, that Pierre quivered with apprehension at hearing nothing but the silence of the

grave. And as he followed Victorine, who, lamp in hand, was still descending, he thought of the brother and sister who were left alone in the ruined palace, last relics of a world which had half passed away. All hope of life had departed with Benedetta and Dario, no resurrection could come from that old maid and that priest who was bound to chastity. Ah! those interminable and lugubrious passages, that frigid and gigantic staircase which seemed to descend into nihility, those huge halls with cracking walls where all was wretchedness and abandonment! And that inner court, looking like a cemetery with its weeds and its damp porticus, where remnants of Apollos and Venuses were rotting! And the little deserted garden, fragrant with ripe oranges, whither nobody now would ever stray, where none would ever meet that adorable Contessina under the laurels near the sarcophagus! All was now annihilated in abominable mourning, in a death-like silence, amidst which the two last Boccaneras must wait, in savage grandeur, till their palace should fall about their heads. Pierre could only just detect a faint sound, the gnawing of a mouse perhaps, unless it were caused by Abbé Paparelli attacking the walls of some out-of-the-way rooms, preying on the old edifice down below, so as to hasten its fall.

The cab stood at the door, already laden with the luggage, the box beside the driver, the valise on the seat; and the priest at once got in.

"Oh! You have plenty of time," said Victorine, who had remained on the foot-pavement. "Nothing has been forgotten. I'm glad to see you go off comfortably."

And indeed at that last moment Pierre was comforted by the presence of that worthy woman, his compatriot, who had greeted him on his arrival and now attended his departure. "I won't say 'till we meet again,' Monsieur l'Abbé," she exclaimed, "for I don't fancy that you'll soon be back in this horrid city. Good-bye, Monsieur l'Abbé."

"Good-bye, Victorine, and thank you with all my heart."

The cab was already going off at a fast trot, turning into the narrow sinuous street which leads to the Corso Vittoria Emanuele. It was not raining and so the hood had not been raised, but although the damp atmosphere was comparatively mild, Pierre at once felt a chill. However, he was unwilling to stop the driver, a silent fellow whose only desire seemingly was to get rid of his fare as soon as possible. When the cab came out into the Corso Vittoria Emanuele, the young man was astonished to find it already quite deserted, the houses shut, the footways bare, and the electric lamps burning all alone in melancholy solitude. In truth, however, the temperature was far from warm and the fog seemed to be increasing, hiding the house-fronts more and more. When Pierre passed the Cancelleria, that stern colossal pile seemed to him to be receding, fading away; and farther on, upon the right, at the end of the Via di Ara Coeli, starred by a few smoky gas lamps, the Capitol had quite vanished in the gloom. Then the thoroughfare narrowed, and the cab went on between the dark heavy masses of the Gesù and the Altieri palace; and there in that contracted passage, where even on fine

sunny days one found all the dampness of old times, the quivering priest yielded to a fresh train of thought. It was an idea which had sometimes made him feel anxious, the idea that mankind, starting from over yonder in Asia, had always marched onward with the sun. An east wind had always carried the human seed for future harvest towards the west. And for a long while now the cradle of humanity had been stricken with destruction and death, as if indeed the nations could only advance by stages, leaving exhausted soil, ruined cities, and degenerate populations behind, as they marched from orient to occident, towards their unknown goal. Nineveh and Babylon on the banks of the Euphrates, Thebes and Memphis on the banks of the Nile, had been reduced to dust, sinking from old age and weariness into a deadly numbness beyond possibility of awakening. Then decrepitude had spread to the shores of the great Mediterranean lake, burying both Tyre and Sidon with dust, and afterwards striking Carthage with senility whilst it yet seemed in full splendour. In this wise as mankind marched on, carried by the hidden forces of civilisation from east to west, it marked each day's journey with ruins; and how frightful was the sterility nowadays displayed by the cradle of History, that Asia and that Egypt, which had once more lapsed into childhood, immobilised in ignorance and degeneracy amidst the ruins of ancient cities that once had been queens of the world!

It was thus Pierre reflected as the cab rolled on. Still he was not unconscious of his surroundings. As he passed the Palazzo di Venezia it seemed to him to

be crumbling beneath some assault of the invisible, for the mist had already swept away its battlements, and the lofty, bare, fearsome walls looked as if they were staggering from the onslaught of the growing darkness. And after passing the deep gap of the Corso, which was also deserted amidst the pallid radiance of its electric lights, the Palazzo Torlonia appeared on the right-hand, with one wing ripped open by the picks of demolishers, whilst on the left, farther up, the Palazzo Colonna showed its long, mournful façade and closed windows, as if, now that it was deserted by its masters and void of its ancient pomp, it awaited the demolishers in its turn.

Then, as the cab at a slower pace began to climb the ascent of the Via Nazionale, Pierre's reverie continued. Was not Rome also stricken, had not the hour come for her to disappear amidst that destruction which the nations on the march invariably left behind them? Greece, Athens, and Sparta slumbered beneath their glorious memories, and were of no account in the world of to-day. Moreover, the growing paralysis had already invaded the lower portion of the Italic peninsula; and after Naples certainly came the turn of Rome. She was on the very margin of the death spot which ever extends over the old continent, that margin where agony begins, where the impoverished soil will no longer nourish and support cities, where men themselves seem stricken with old age as soon as they are born. For two centuries Rome had been declining, withdrawing little by little from modern life, having neither manufactures nor trade, and being incapable even of science, litera-

ture, or art. And in Pierre's thoughts it was no longer St. Peter's only that fell, but all Rome—basilicas, palaces, and entire districts—which collapsed amidst a supreme rending, and covered the seven hills with a chaos of ruins. Like Nineveh and Babylon, and like Thebes and Memphis, Rome became but a plain, bossy with remnants, amidst which one vainly sought to identify the sites of ancient edifices, whilst its sole denizens were coiling serpents and bands of rats.

The cab turned, and on the right, in a huge gap of darkness Pierre recognised Trajan's column, but it was no longer gilded by the sun as when he had first seen it; it now rose up blackly like the dead trunk of a giant tree whose branches have fallen from old age. And farther on, when he raised his eyes while crossing the little triangular piazza, and perceived a real tree against the leaden sky, that parasol pine of the Villa Aldobrandini which rises there like a symbol of Rome's grace and pride, it seemed to him but a smear, a little cloud of soot ascending from the downfall of the whole city.

With the anxious, fraternal turn of his feelings, fear was coming over him as he reached the end of his tragic dream. When the numbness which spreads across the aged world should have passed Rome, when Lombardy should have yielded to it, and Genoa, Turin, and Milan should have fallen asleep as Venice has fallen already, then would come the turn of France. The Alps would be crossed, Marseilles, like Tyre and Sidon, would see its port choked up by sand, Lyons would sink into desolation and slumber, and at last

Paris, invaded by the invincible torpor, and transformed into a sterile waste of stones bristling with nettles, would join Rome and Nineveh and Babylon in death, whilst the nations continued their march from orient to occident following the sun. A great cry sped through the gloom, the death cry of the Latin races! History, which seemed to have been born in the basin of the Mediterranean, was being transported elsewhere, and the ocean had now become the centre of the world. How many hours of the human day had gone by? Had mankind, starting from its cradle over yonder at daybreak, strewing its road with ruins from stage to stage, now accomplished one-half of its day and reached the dazzling hour of noon? If so, then the other half of the day allotted to it was beginning, the new world was following the old one, the new world of those American cities where democracy was forming and the religion of to-morrow was sprouting, those sovereign queens of the coming century, with yonder, across another ocean, on the other side of the globe, that motionless Far East, mysterious China and Japan, and all the threatening swarm of the yellow races.

However, while the cab climbed higher and higher up the Via Nazionale, Pierre felt his nightmare dissipating. There was here a lighter atmosphere, and he came back into a renewal of hope and courage. Yet the Banca d'Italia, with its brand-new ugliness, its chalky hugeness, looked to him like a phantom in a shroud; whilst above a dim expanse of gardens the Quirinal formed but a black streak barring the heavens. However, the street ever ascended and

broadened, and on the summit of the Viminal, on the Piazza delle Terme, when he passed the ruins of Diocletian's baths, he could breathe as his lungs listed. No, no, the human day could not finish, it was eternal, and the stages of civilisation would follow and follow without end! What mattered that eastern wind which carried the nations towards the west, as if borne on by the power of the sun! If necessary, they would return across the other side of the globe, they would again and again make the circuit of the earth, until the day should come when they could establish themselves in peace, truth, and justice. After the next civilisation on the shores of the Atlantic, which would become the world's centre, skirted by queenly cities, there would spring up yet another civilisation, having the Pacific for its centre, with seaport capitals that could not be yet foreseen, whose germs yet slumbered on unknown shores. And in like way there would be still other civilisations and still others! And at that last moment, the inspiring thought came to Pierre that the great movement of the nations was the instinct, the need which impelled them to return to unity. Originating in one sole family, afterwards parted and dispersed in tribes, thrown into collision by fratricidal hatred, their tendency was none the less to become one sole family again. The provinces united in nations, the nations would unite in races, and the races would end by uniting in one immortal mankind—mankind at last without frontiers, or possibility of wars, mankind living by just labour amidst an universal commonwealth. Was not this indeed the evolution, the

object of the labour progressing everywhere, the finish reserved to History? Might Italy then become a strong and healthy nation, might concord be established between her and France, and might that fraternity of the Latin races become the beginning of universal fraternity! Ah! that one fatherland, the whole earth pacified and happy, in how many centuries would that come — and what a dream!

Then, on reaching the station the scramble prevented Pierre from thinking any further. He had to take his ticket and register his luggage, and afterwards he at once climbed into the train. At dawn on the next day but one, he would be back in Paris.

END OF VOL. II.

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